

Chapter 29 - A Wedding to Remember

The 6 months between Ralph's return from Louisiana and their wedding passed faster than Sam and Ralph had thought, maybe because they were too busy to realize it. Samantha got the invitations out in time, and remembered to call Ron. "Ron, its Samantha. The wedding is June 16th at 12 noon at the First Baptist church of Chapel Hill. You'll want to fly to Charlotte North Carolina. Let us know your flight number and we'll have Nelson meet you with the limousine. Doc and Bert said you could stay with us while you're here, so there's no need to book a hotel, besides all the good ones are booked anyways that weekend. OK, e-mail me the flight number and the time it's supposed to arrive in Charlotte. Can't wait to see you too - bye!"

Ron called Alaska Airlines, booked 2 first class tickets to Charlotte North Carolina for Friday June 15th. They had a 1-stop flight with a change of planes and airlines in Seattle that would arrive at 3:00 pm Friday afternoon. It left Anchorage at 0800. Ron checked with Nancy and booked the flight. Since he had a agreement with Alaska Airlines, the Anchorage to Seattle leg of the flight was free for both of them, and they charged Ron the Exchange rate for the Delta flight to Charlotte. Ron was glad he owned Allakaket Airlines, since First Class tickets for that long of a flight were now running over \$1500 each at the discount rate that they sold to travel agents. The tickets only cost him \$400 total. He e-mailed Samantha the flight number and the scheduled arrival time of 3:00pm local on Friday the 15th. He checked, and his tuxedo was sitting in the bag in the closet. Since he hadn't gained any weight since he bought it 3 years ago, it should still fit. Nancy had a beautiful but conservative formal dress she bought for the same event that he was pretty sure would fit. He very diplomatically asked Nancy if she made sure that dress still fit. Nancy told him that if anything she had lost 20 pounds since she bought it when she was 3 months pregnant with Sarah. Ron was glad that was settled. In a little less than a week, they would fly to North Carolina, and see a woman he hadn't seen for almost 10 years, and meet her fiancé for the first time.

He called Anne and she answered the phone "Anne's Babysitting Service" Ron loved his mom's sense of humor. Then he remembered she had free Caller ID, just like the rest of town. "Real Funny Mom - but you're right, Nancy and I are flying on Friday to North Carolina for Samantha's wedding. I'm going to be the best man, and Nancy is the Matron of honor. You don't mind, thanks Mom. Can you make it Thursday afternoon, we've got to be out of here by 5:30 to make an 8 o'clock flight. OK, you'll be here by 5 - Thanks, and I love you too Mom!"

Thursday evening, Anne arrived right at 5:00 pm, just in time to help out with Feeding Time. Jake and Josh were such chow hounds that Nancy felt like a lion keeper at the zoo, just throw them a T-bone, and they'll take care of the rest. Sarah was a picky eater, and needed a cheering section sometimes. David was perfectly happy with a bottle or a jar of baby food. He took after his brothers, and would eat anything you placed before him. Once the kids and Moose were fed, they went in the playroom while the adults ate. Nancy set up her seat at the table so she could view the monitor in the kid room. Ron said grace, and they ate. Nancy and Ron went to

bed around 8:00, since they had to be up early the next morning. Anne went to bed early, it would be a long week dealing with 3 kids and an infant. Ron and Nancy had their bags packed and sitting by the door. Nancy set the coffee machine and had a bag of muffins and a thermos with 2 cups ready to go next to it. The maintenance crew knew they were flying early tomorrow, and would have the SA-76 007 prepped and ready to go at 0600. Their alarms went off at 0500, and they were dressed and out the door at 0530 before anyone could wake up and slow them down. Moose gave Ron a muzzle, and he petted Moose briefly and told him to take care of the house. They drove to the airport, and the chopper was prepped and the turbines idling when they got there. They climbed quickly aboard, and Ron asked Nancy "You brought your P-14 and your CCW, right?"

"Duh! Of course silly, it's like my American Express Card."

2 hours later they were landing in Anchorage. They landed at the Alaska Airlines private heliport, and got a ride over to the gate they were flying out of, bypassing security. The driver made sure their luggage got aboard the aircraft as well. They walked up to the boarding area, and someone was on the ball, because their boarding passes and transfers had already been taken care of. Ron guessed correctly that the guy who gave them a lift called ahead to make sure they got the VIP treatment. They were immediately boarded, and 15 minutes later, the plane took off for Seattle. 2 hours later, they were landing in Seattle, and they were driven to their connecting flight with their luggage, to make sure it made the plane. 15 minutes after they boarded, they were bound for Charlotte. Ron and Nancy napped on the flight, and landed in Charlotte right after they woke up. Nelson met them at the baggage claim, and had a cart already for their luggage. He walked with them to the Silver Lincoln Continental Stretch limousine, and held the door open, then put their baggage in the trunk. An hour later, they were pulling up the driveway to this huge Southern Mansion. Ron thought their house was huge, but this mansion was easily 3 times the size of their house.

Doc and Bert greeted them on the porch. Ron introduced Nancy, then Samantha made her appearance. She was even more beautiful than Ron remembered. She squealed like a little girl, ran up to Ron, and squeezed the stuffing out of him. She didn't kiss him even though she wanted to, since she realized that wouldn't be appropriate. She let go of Ron, and said "This must be Nancy, you're even more beautiful in person" then gave Nancy a very strong hug as well. She asked them to come on in, they had a lot of catching up to do. Nancy thought that Sam really did like her, and she was glad, since she had thought of Samantha as the "competition" for years. Raphael was waiting in the drawing room, and stood as soon as they entered. Sam said "Ron and Nancy Williams, may I present my fiancé Raphael Lacombe."

Ron amazed them all when he walked up to Ralph and said "Heureux de vous rencontrer Raphaël !

Le sentiment est Ron mutuel !

“Sorry Ralph, that just about exhausts my French!”

“I appreciate the effort Ron. I just spent a year in Louisiana setting up clinics for Cajun speakers in the Bayou. Most of them don’t speak much English. Funny, you speak French with a Canadian accent.”

“Probably because the only person who spoke French in Allakaket was Canadian!”

“That explains it! Let’s go sit down and get comfortable.”

They all sat in the huge living room and got caught up. Soon it was time for dinner, and their black housekeeper and cook told them that dinner was served. They all got up and walked into the formal dining room. When they were all seated, Doc said Grace “Father, we’re here for a joyous occasion, the joining of two lives as one as you ordained. Bless this assembly and this union, and thank you for the food, Amen.” 5 voices echoed his Amen, and the plates were passed. Ron thought the food was excellent, even though he hadn’t eaten foods like this before. There was Virginia Baked Ham, sweet potatoes, okra, rustic style mashed potatoes with pan gravy, and corn bread. For dessert there was Peach Cobbler. They ate their fill, and then retired to the drawing room to socialize some more. Around 10:00, Doc noticed Ron and Nancy were getting visibly tired, then remembered they had a long flight and were probably ready for bed. “Ron and Nancy, Nelson put your bags in your room. It’s down that hallway and the 3rd door on the right. Breakfast is at 8:00, and we’re leaving for the church at 10:00 to get dressed at the church.”

Ron and Nancy said goodnight, and went to bed after taking showers since they were too exhausted to do anything else. They got up at 7:30 the next morning, and got dressed. Breakfast was a huge expanse of food, and Doc said grace again. They talked for a while after breakfast, and Doc told Ron and Nancy they would be riding with them, since they reserved another limousine for Raphael and Samantha. At 9:45, a big white stretch limousine drove up the driveway, then Ralph and Sam went to get their stuff and put it in the limo for the ride to the church. Ron took his garment bag with his tuxedo, and Nancy took her garment bag with her dress and shoes out to the limo. 5 minutes later, Doc and Bert joined them. They drove to the church, and were shown to the dressing rooms. Once he was dressed, Ron helped Raphael since he had never worn a tuxedo before. He was wearing a dazzling white long-tailed tuxedo, and Ron was wearing a more conservative short-tailed black one. At 10 to 12, they walked out to the altar and waited for the procession. At 12:00, Reverend Whitaker took his place, then the music started, and Nancy was the first down the isle, then Samantha. She was radiant in her long white dress with a 6-foot train and a long white veil and finger-tip white lace gloves.

The wedding had started, and Reverend Whitaker was reading in Corinthians when a strange man burst into the church and yelled “No one’s gonna take my little girl from me!” then pulled out an M -4 Carbine.

Reverend Whitaker dove toward Samantha to protect her with his body; at the same time Ron, who was wearing his P-14 in an IWB holster under his tuxedo, straight-armed Ralph out of the line of fire, drew his gun, and double-tapped the assailant in the chest. Hearing a 3rd shot, he looked to his left, and Nancy's gun was smoking too, and then Ron noticed the back of assailant's head was blown off. Raphael recovered from being knocked over, and told Reverend Whitaker that it was OK, and to get Sam up and take her to his office, so she didn't have to see the body.

Ron checked on Nancy, who was looking pale, so he found her a seat before she fainted. He whispered in her ear. "Nancy, you saved Sam's life. Remember that regardless of what happens." Nancy nodded. Meanwhile Doc checked out the assailant, and one look told him he was beyond help.

Ron finally got a good look at the assailant, and he said "Oh my God, That's Steve Stone - he was supposed to be in prison for life for murdering Samantha's mother."

Doc called 911 with his cell phone, while they covered the body with a sheet. The police were there in minutes, Ron and Nancy both surrendered their firearms, and the Detective quickly confirmed their story, including the information that Steve Stone had killed a guard and broken out of the Alaska State Penitentiary 2 weeks ago. They took Steve's prints, and as soon as they came back as a match, and Ron presented his Federal CCW, they handed Ron and Nancy back their guns. The Coroner took the body away, and Ron told Raphael whom the assailant was. He left it up to Ralph what to tell his wife. Thinking quickly, Reverend Whitaker told everyone that there was a beautiful garden gazebo out back, and he could marry them there if they wanted.

Samantha took the news of her father's death fairly well. Her only comment was "Too bad I didn't have a gun, I would have loved to get a shot in."

Samantha and Raphael met with Ron and Nancy. Samantha hugged Nancy and thanked her for saving her life, then she hugged Ron again. "Well, I guess this makes 3 times you saved my life! So has your red cape ever come back from the cleaners?"

"Don't need one - I don't have any super powers, none that I'm aware of anyway!"

Raphael gave Ron a big hug and said "Now I know why Samantha likes you so much. You're going to have to teach me to shoot sometime."

"Ralph, I thought doctors were supposed to save lives, not take them?"

"Well in that case, I'd be able to fix the damage too! Thanks for saving both of our lives. Are you guys OK if we get married out back in half an hour?"

Ron looked at Nancy, whose color was returning. "Nancy, you up to this?"

“Ron, if they don’t get married, he wins, at least a little - let’s get them hitched!”

Half an hour later in the beautiful garden gazebo, Reverend Whitaker picked up right where he left off. “Raphael, do you take Samantha as your wife today and for the rest of your life. Do you promise before God and this assembly to love, honor and protect her the rest of your life, forsaking all others, to be with her the rest of your life.”

“I Do!”

“Samantha, do you take Raphael as your husband, do you promise to love, honor, and respect him the rest of your life, forsaking all others, to be one with him the rest of your life.”

“I Do!”

With the exchange of Rings and Vows, I declare you Raphael and Samantha to be husband and wife before God. By the power vested in me as a Baptist Minister, I hereby declare you married according to the laws of God and the state of North Carolina. What God has joined, let no man put asunder. Raphael, you may kiss your bride!”

“Ladies and Gentlemen, may I present to you Raphael and Samantha Lacombe!”

The small congregation stood and applauded wildly. Ron and Nancy were the first to congratulate the bride and groom, then Doc and Bert. The entire wedding party got into limousines for the ride back to Doc and Bert’s house for the reception.

During the ride home, Doc Richards looked disapprovingly at Ron and said “I hope you don’t plan on taking your guns into my home!”

Before Ron could say anything, Bert looked at Doc and said “Eugene, if Ron had done what you wish he had, and left that gun at home, we’d all be dead right now, including Samantha and Raphael. What happened at that wedding was Wicked and Evil, but the Wicked and Evil was because of Steve Stone, not Ron. Steve brought his death upon himself when he threatened to kill innocent people. If a police officer had shot Steve, you wouldn’t think twice about it. Well, the cops weren’t there, and I’m Damn Glad Ron brought his gun, and Nancy too, otherwise Samantha would be dead, and most if not all of us - now you apologize to Ron!”

Doc turned to Ron and said “Young Man, I’m sorry! I’ve spent my whole life trying to save lives, and I always thought guns were evil - just for killing. It took my wife to point out to me that guns in private hands can also protect innocent life. How can I ever repay you?”

“Doc, if you’ll never vote to restrict the rights of law-abiding citizens to own and carry guns, I’ll call it even. You can’t undo the damage done to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, but you can stop any further erosion of those rights. Also, you can use this incident as an

example of why law-abiding citizens should be allowed to carry concealed if you're ever asked.”

“Ron, you’re asking a lot of me!”

“Doc, you asked - I gave you an honest answer. You realize that if I didn’t have a Federal CCW, I would probably be in jail right now, and trying to explain to a judge why I was carrying concealed in North Carolina! They won’t recognize an Alaskan CCW.”

“You’re kidding - Right Ron?”

“Unfortunately no, Doc. The Liberals who hate guns, or more accurately hate armed citizens, have had a long time to erode the right to keep and bear arms. They’ve got armed bodyguards, fenced enclosures around their million dollar mansions, and armored limousines to protect them from the same people their constituents face every day, yet these same elitists want to disarm them to control them more easily. I know you’ve probably read Animal Farm, and the Pigs’ famous line “We’re all equal, just some are more equal than others.” Well, that’s the Liberal world view in a nutshell. We’re all equal - equally poor, with them in charge and wealthy. You have earned every dime you own, so you know all about paying taxes. If they had there way, they would ratchet up the tax brackets to confiscatory levels, and have a social program for every lazy bum that didn’t want to work, or felt the jobs they could do were beneath them. We’re already seeing it now, with multiple generations of inner city families on welfare, and babies having babies. And you know the drug addition statistics. They’re all symptoms of the same problem. Large parts of the population are being bought off with the taxes taken from the rest of the population, so they will vote for the people who keep the welfare checks coming. Look at England. They have some of the highest taxes in Europe, and the highest unemployment rates, because businesses that were once profitable have been taxed to death, and employers can’t afford to hire anyone. Do you want the US to become like that?”

“Of course not Ron.”

“Well it’s happening right in front of your eyes - take a good look around if you dare!”

They arrived at Doc and Bert’s house just in time to end the conversation while it was still civil. When Nelson stopped the car, he walked back to the passenger compartment, opened the door, and helped everyone out of the limousine. Doc turned to Ron and said “Ron, you’ve given me a lot to think about, now let’s go in and enjoy the rest of the reception, shall we!”

“Thanks Doc. If you want to talk about this later, call or e-mail me.”

With that they walked into the house which had been gaily decorated for the reception.

Moments later, the bridal limousine pulled up, and the driver helped Raphael out, who then

gave Samantha his arm, and they walked up the stairs arm in arm. The reception was more like a small intimate party than a big soirée. Since there were only around 50 wedding guests, they fit easily on the bottom floor of Doc's house. They had a buffet table for lunch, a 3-tier wedding cake, and a large non-alcoholic punch bowl. There were fancy seats set against the wall for people who wanted to eat or talk sitting down, but most of the people stood and mingled. Finally Reverend Whitaker made an appearance, and after congratulating the bride and groom, took Ron and Nancy aside. "Ron, I normally frown on guns in church, but in your case, I'd definitely make an exception. You two literally saved our lives. I found out from the detective that Steve's finger was on the trigger, and the selector was set to full auto. Nancy, that 3rd shot to his forehead guaranteed he couldn't pull the trigger, so you probably did save a lot of lives with that 3rd shot. Ron, I've been around a lot of policemen and was even a Chaplain in the Marines, but I've never seen someone move as fast as you, and shoot so accurately. The coroner said both rounds would have been fatal and were right through the heart-lung region. Where'd you learn to shoot like that?"

"Reverend Whitaker, One of my friends and an officer in Allakaket Airlines is an Ex-Seal diving instructor. He not only taught me, but everyone in our town that wanted to how to shoot. I was a pretty good pistol shot before then because our cabin was in the middle of bear country, so I grew up with a pistol in my hand. I used a Ruger 22/45 for taking squirrels and other small game, and a Colt Anaconda .44 Magnum as my Bear gun. Last time I counted, I've shot 6 bears that were attacking, or too close to let go safely. Nancy here is the reigning Champion woman's pistol shot for the Town of Allakaket. Bill Ayer and I built a 10-lane 100-yard indoor shooting range in town after several terrorist attacks in the vicinity. I found out that if I made membership in the range an employee benefit, I could write off all the expenses including practice ammo as employee benefit expenses. We have weekly shooting contests, and during the winter, the citizens of Allakaket are either at the range, or using the indoor pool we built for the community,"

"Wow, if I didn't have a congregation here, I'd be tempted to move to Allakaket."

"You know Reverend, any major corporation in the United States could do the same thing if they wanted to."

"Anyway, I just wanted to thank the two of you for saving everyone's lives today, and give you that extra information I had."

"You're welcome Reverend, and God Bless!"

Nancy turned to Ron with a big smile of relief on her face. "Ron, I'm glad the Reverend told me about that, or I would always wonder if that 3rd shot was gratuitous. Since the gun was set to full auto, and his finger was on the trigger, that third shot was necessary to make sure he couldn't pull the trigger."

“Not only that, but I never thought he might be wearing a vest. If he was, and I stopped shooting, we’d all be dead. Looks like I need to work on my Failure to Stop Drills again. By the way, where were you hiding that gun?”

“Ever see Miss Congeniality with Sandra Bullock?”

Ron laughed out loud “You were wearing a thigh holster under that dress - I never would have known! I guess you really do treat your P-14 like your American Express Card!”

“Right, it doesn’t do me a lot of good home on the nightstand.” Ron held Nancy for a while, and gave her a big kiss, then he said, “Let’s go rejoin the party!”

They laughed and joked a while, when Doc told them he needed to talk.

“Ron, I found out from Reverend Whitaker that if you two wouldn’t have shot when you did, especially Nancy, we could all be dead! Again, just wanted to say thanks, and I’m sorry for what I said on the way over.”

“Don’t worry Doc, you have strongly held beliefs, and I understand.”

Doc shook Ron and Nancy’s hands, then said he had to get back to his other guests. The three of them walked back into the reception and picked up where they left off.

Later that evening, it was time to open the gifts. Among all the other gifts, there was a single envelope there with “Ralph and Sam” on the cover in Doc’s writing. Sam opened it, and there was a note and a passbook. The note said the passbook was for a Trust Fund, which had \$500,000.00 in it. Any disbursements would require both their signatures, and would be limited to major purchases, like a new house or car. Sam and Ralph both gave Doc and Bert big tearful hugs.

“Ralph, now that the state has forgiven your Guaranteed Student loan debts, I felt that a trust fund was in order to help you buy a really nice house to raise your children in. I’d highly suggest renting until you get established, since if you sell a house within the first 3 years of buying it, your costs usually are more than any increase in market value, and you loose money.”

Ralph said “Thanks Doc. We’ve already decided to live in Atlanta. The main hospital there has already accepted my application for ER Assistant Chief Resident, and Sam’s completed her internship in Emergency Surgery, so they’ve accepted her as well into their residency program. We’ll be working the same shift, so we’ll get to spend a lot of time together. We planned on renting for the first 2 years until we were comfortable in Atlanta, and knew the market better.”

Sam said “Thanks Mom and Dad - you two have been like parents to me, so if it’s OK with you, when we have children, we’d like both of you to be their grandparents.”

Bert hugged the stuffing out of Sam. They never were able to have kids of their own, and now they were going to be grandparents!

“Sam, I don’t know how to thank you!”

“You two have been the parents I’ve always dreamed about, and who you see standing before you today is mostly because of your love and caring. God had a lot to do with it, but you took me in, helped me get my life back together, gave me an education, and you love me like your own daughter, so I hope you don’t mind if I call you Mom and Dad!”

Bert thought that deserved another hug, and Samantha was wondering if Bert was part python.

Later that evening, when things broke up, Ron and Nancy went to say their Goodbyes to the newlyweds. Sam hugged the stuffing out of Ron, saying “Thanks for everything Ron, You two will always be special friends to us.”

Ralph gave Ron a hug too, and said “Thanks again for being there for us, and saving our lives. I was serious about learning to shoot, but I realize it might be inconvenient for you to fly from Alaska to Atlanta, so maybe you could recommend someone. When we’re qualified, both of us want to get CCW’s if we can.”

“Ralph, when I get home, I’ll talk to Bear and see if he knows anyone in the Atlanta area who can train you. As far as the CCWs, I might be able to help, since you’ve both been the victims of violent crimes. I have some low friends in high places that might be able to help.”

“Merci vraiment monsieur!”

“You’re Welcome Raphaël. Bon Jour, and Au Revoir.”

Ralph laughed “you’re French is not bad, but you still speak it like a French Canadian.”

“Probably because the person who taught me enough French to get in trouble was Canadian.”

Meanwhile Samantha and Nancy were getting some quality “girl time”, they were laughing and giggling by the time Ron was ready to leave. Ralph and Sam were staying there that night, and flying to Aruba the next morning for their honeymoon. They had a month before they reported to Atlanta, which would give them 2 weeks in Aruba, and enough time to move their few possessions to Atlanta. Ralph wanted to buy a SUV and rent a trailer, since they needed another vehicle anyway. Ralph and Sam decided to sell his 10-year old Honda, and return the Carmen Gia to Doc, since they were working the same shift they could drive to work together.

Chapter 30 - Mini-Vacation

Ron and Nancy stayed in a Charlotte hotel that night, and called Anne the next morning. She said she was doing fine, and had the rest of the week off, she suggested they take a vacation. Ron thought that was a good idea and Nancy reminded him they were less than a couple of hours north of Florida, and they could do diving in the Florida Keys. The desk clerk was extremely helpful, and allowed Ron to use the Internet for a couple of minutes. He found a listing of diving sites, and a company that did diving tours for experienced divers. They provided the boat, crew, and gear. By now Nancy had found a more conservative swimsuit since they used the pool several times a month, so she wouldn't give anyone a heart attack. He contacted the company, and they had a boat and crew available. They'd charge \$500 for a 3-day diving trip in the Keys. Ron asked them to hold the boat for them; they were driving down from North Carolina. The owner said they shouldn't try to dive today, so they would reserve it for tomorrow. Ron thanked him, and asked the Hotel Clerk if they did rental vehicles. He was looking for a nice luxury SUV, She said they had an arrangement with Hertz Rentals, and checking her computer, they had a 2004 Oldsmobile Bravada that was fully loaded for \$200/week with unlimited mileage, deductible waiver, and a full tank of gas. Ron told her they were going diving, and asked if she could pull up the location. She said she could do 1 better, and gave him the GPS coordinates to the location, and a nearby hotel in their chain that they could stay overnight. She handed Ron the printout, and asked if he wanted the vehicle. It could be at the hotel's front door in half an hour. Ron told her to make the arrangements, and handed her his AMEX to charge the vehicle rental on.

She reserved a night at the chain hotel, and 20 minutes later, the vehicle drove up. She had already checked them out, and Nancy got their bags out of the room while Ron was taking care of the paperwork. They signed the rental agreement, and loaded the SUV. Ron entered the coordinates for the hotel and the dive shop. He selected the hotel, and the car's GPS navigation system gave him turn-by turn directions to the front door of the hotel. They arrived at the hotel later that evening, and spent the night, and drove to the dive shop early the next morning. After presenting his AMEX card and their PADI diving certificates, and signing their lives away, they checked out the boat and the crew. Ron felt OK, and Nancy felt that they were pretty safe with this crew, so they hired them for a 3-day diving cruise. The captain showed them several diving sites, and they selected 6 they wanted to dive since they were all within recreational dive limits. He checked the air tanks, hoses, and regulators and they looked brand-new. Even the masks, fins, and snorkels looked new. He asked the captain, and he told them they replace their dive gear every couple of years, since it was cheaper than getting sued, and they had just bought new gear before the start of this season. Ron and Nancy locked up the SUV, and took their stuff aboard the boat.

They shoved off 5 minutes later, and 2 hours later were at the first site. Ron and Nancy had already suited up, and the first mate helped them into their gear and helped them check it. Then he handed them each an underwater camera. It was an unexpected bonus, and Ron thanked

them. The first site was an old 1800's era wreck, and it was full of fish. Ron and Nancy shot a bunch of pictures, then they surfaced, moved to the next site, and did it all over again. Their stateroom was pretty luxurious for a dive boat, and the food was good. Overnight, they relocated to the next dive site, so they would be ready to go first thing in the morning. When the 3-day diving holiday was over, Nancy told Ron that this was the most fun she had had outside of their bedroom since they were married.

They drove back to Charlotte, and called Delta to see when they could book 2 first class seats to Seattle with a transfer to Alaska Airlines and Anchorage. The Delta operator spotted the VIP code, and amazingly found 2 first-class seats on their 0800 flight to Seattle the next morning. That worked for Ron, who didn't want to fly too soon after all that diving. They checked into the hotel, got a good night's sleep, and drove the rental to the rental drop-off at the airport the next morning. The rental courtesy van drove them to the main entrance, and after Ron and Nancy presented their Federal CCWs, they were escorted around security and walked to the gate right as they were announcing pre-boarding. The airline agent exchanged the return half of their round-trip tickets for boarding passes for the rest of the trip, and told them to have a nice day. They walked aboard the aircraft, and were shown 2 seats together in First Class. Once they were settled, the Steward asked if they wanted anything, and took their meal order. They both ordered the steak and vegetable omelet. 5 minutes later, the plane started filling up, and as soon as the door closed, they started backing up to the taxiway, then they took off for Seattle. They reversed the process when they transferred back to Alaska Airlines, and soon were on their way home. The 007 was waiting for them at the Alaska Airlines private heliport, and someone from Alaska Airlines was waiting for them at the gate. They would collect their bags, and drive them over to the private heliport. Half an hour later they were flying home to Allakaket. Ron was glad he got some sleep on the flight home, because Nancy was exhausted, and fell asleep on the flight from Anchorage to Allakaket. Anne greeted them at the door, and they were promptly mobbed by 2 boys and a dog. Sarah was hanging back, and David was in Anne's arms asleep. Nancy picked up Sarah and gave her a big hug and a kiss, and Sarah gave her mom a big smile in return. Anne kept an eye on the kids the rest of the afternoon so Ron and Nancy could get some sleep.

The next morning Bear called and needed to see Ron face to face, since all the TG's were busy, Ron called and had them prep a 007 for a quick hop to Alaska Survival Inc. He kissed Nancy, gave his mom a hug, and said he'd see them later, then drove to the airport where one of the S-76 helicopters was idling, waiting for him. He parked the truck, climbed aboard, belted in, and the crew chief closed and locked the door, then tapped the pilot on the shoulder once he was securely belted in too, and the pilot increased the throttle, and lifted into the air, and adopted a nose-down attitude, then slowly rose into the air. 1 hour later, he landed in the main compound, and the pilot shut down. Once the rotor stopped spinning, the crew chief opened the door and Ron got out and practically walked into Bear. "Bear what's up?"

"General Shepard just delivered a bunch of stuff, and I'm running out of room to store it. I wanted your permission to re-distribute some of it to your lodge, and we need to build an

armory for Allakaket itself.”

“You could have called me for that, what’s up?”

“I wanted you to see what General Shepard sent, we’re now getting front-line small arms.” They walked inside the Main building they used for the survival school, which was temporarily empty because the students were out in the field. There was a Pelican case on the center table. Bear opened it, and Ron’s chin almost hit the floor. It looked like an M -4 carbine with all the accessories. “Bear, what the heck is this?”

“General Shepard is sending us Special Forces equipment for some reason, this is the SOPMOD M4.”

“I recognize the M -4 carbine, but what’s the rest of this stuff?”

Bear started taking stuff out of the case and attaching it to the carbine. The first piece was an ACOG 4x scope that he said was good out to 600 meters, then pulled out an M -203 grenade launcher with a QD mount, and attached that as well, finally he pulled a suppressor out of the case and locked it to the barrel with a twist and a click. “This is the basic configuration for the SOPMOD M4, it takes other optics and gear to enhance NVG targeting. The suppressor reduces the firing noise by 30db, and as you can see, just clicks on and off. There are 99 more of these on a pallet next door in the shelter. It’s so full of weapons that we can’t use it - so we need to redistribute it. Hunter said he saw a spot that would work great for a shelter/armory for the town, since it’s stuck between the two main hangars, and you really can’t build anything else there. He volunteered to help you blast the dirt loose, since you could damage nearby buildings if you overshoot. I’ve got a plan for a shelter that can shelter a couple of hundred people in an emergency, with an Armory above it. We need to get going because we need to store this stuff elsewhere because my shelter is too full for us to use. Now that we’ve got General Shepard’s letter, we can be a little more overt about our military hardware.”

“OK, Bear, make it happen. So what else were you planning on storing in Allakaket?”

“I was going to leave 10 of these SOPMOD weapons systems and 120 40mm grenades at your lodge, since your shelter is huge, and leave 10 of them here, leaving 80 units to store in Allakaket. We’ve got over 1200 40mm grenades in cases of 12, half of them are HE grenades, and the other half are the HEDP type. If we each keep 120 grenades, that leaves 960 grenades for 80 SOPMOD M4 plus the M-16A2/M203s we already own. We’re expecting another shipment of grenades, plus 5.56, 7.62, and 20mm ammo later this week. Gen. Shepard isn’t telling me why, but he wouldn’t be shipping us all this if he didn’t think we needed it, so we need to review our preparedness and training. First we need to get going on that building. You need to talk to Bill and BA, because this shelter/armory isn’t going to be cheap. You and BA have excellent shelters under your houses, but no one else in Allakaket has got squat. I found out there are around 200 women and children in Allakaket, and my plan can handle 300 people

easily, and it will hold up to anything besides a direct hit with a nuke or a bunker buster. With the armory on top, no one will suspect that there's a huge bomb shelter underneath. This will protect the non-combatants in case we get attacked, and will improve the morale of the militia members to know their wives and children are safe.”

“Great Bear, give us a cost estimate, and we'll get going on it.”

“Ron, I've got it right here, a shelter capable of supporting 300 people for 90 days would cost \$3.5 million dollars, but 2/3 of that is supplies and equipment.”

Ron realized he was worth about \$30 million right now, as was BA, and they owed the townspeople a lot. The militia shot General Wilcox down, and almost all of the townspeople now worked for him in one capacity or another. Between the two of them that would be 1.75 Million a piece. OK, he thought that BA would go for it too, and told Bear that he had a tentative approval to spend up to \$5 Million on the project. Bear gave Ron a bear hug, and walked him back to the helicopter. Bear handed Ron a disk that he said contained the design and a spreadsheet for the costs, then told him to get aboard the helicopter. They flew back to Allakaket, and Ron had a meeting with BA and Bill. They thought it was an excellent idea, since Bear needed an armory in town anyway, and approved it. They were reviewing the project design, and agreed that it would hold up to anything short of a bunker buster or a nuke. The shelter was over 50 feet deep, 200 feet wide and 300 feet long. The opening between the buildings was 250x350, so it would just fit, and they could make it look like another hangar if they made it a steel building. The only problem would be getting the dirt out of the hole, but Ron thought that Hunter might have an idea. He did, and it involved using several pickup trucks as dump trucks, and filling them with dirt then driving them up a ramp and dumping the dirt next to the aircraft ramp to extend and widen the ramp in case they needed a wider ramp in the future. Besides, it would be the best way to hide the excavated dirt.

They contracted for a concrete batch plant, and enough rebar for the “basement”. The floor/roof was supported by huge steel girders and posts. The CH-47 was busy flying the heavy loads to Allakaket, and the Super Stallion took care of all the light stuff. Hunter supervised drilling and blasting 75 feet of earth and rock, then they brought in a huge front-end loader that could fill a 2-ton pickup bed with 1 load. Luckily, Allakaket Airlines had invested in diesel 4x4 F-450s years ago, and it was a simple matter to convert the beds to dump beds. They used all 6 trucks, and flew in several dump trucks from the mine to keep up with the volume. They dug down 75 feet, then filled and compacted gravel in the bottom until they had a firm level bed for the concrete. They were using the pour and erect method for pouring the walls, so they reinforced the floor, made molds for the walls, and then poured and erected the concrete to finish curing in place. The outside of the walls was sprayed with an industrial concrete sealer, since it was neater and faster than applying tar.

Once they got the lower half of the wall in, they stopped and installed all the utilities including a million gallons worth of fresh water tanks, a 5,000 gallon grey-water tank with a settling filter

and a recirculating pump and 1.5 million gallons worth of black water tanks that could be pumped later when necessary. They included one of the diesel generators from the mine, and a 10,000 gallon diesel tank that should last 6 months. Lighting was a mix of warm and cool fluorescent fixtures that simulated normal daylight so plants could grow. They installed enough liquid oxygen tanks and CO₂ scrubbers to last 300 people 6 months as part of a computerized air handling system that constantly monitored the humidity, CO₂ and O₂ levels in the shelter. They included an air filtration system to let in fresh air if the sensors didn't detect radiation or any biological or chemical contaminants. Ron was glad that General Shepard approved and assisted with building the shelter, so they got stuff only the government and military normally had.

Once all the utilities were in, they built the second floor by welding and bolting steel girders, decking and flooring to the steel girder posts. There was still room on the bottom floor to store food and supplies, so they installed a used freight elevator so they could use pallet jacks to move pallets of supplies from the storage/utilities floor to the main floors. Once that was built, they added a 3rd floor 15 feet above the main floor. With the construction of the 3rd floor, they resumed building the side walls, and soon the entire "basement" was fully enclosed on all 4 sides. All it needed was a roof. They erected another steel deck and had the concrete sections all ready to lift into place by the time they were ready for them, and set them on the decking, and connected the sections. They left 1 section open to act as a doorway, which would later be secured by a vault door built into the roof and opened hydraulically. Since the roof was 6 feet below grade, they used some of the native excavated dirt to fill it back in to grade, leaving an opening for the door. The door opening was just bigger than the largest pallet that supplies came in on, so the freight elevator could move them from the top to the bottom of the shelter. The extra orders from their General Store suppliers would barely be noticed with the volume they were buying. By the time they were all said and done, the shelter cost closer to \$10 Million than the \$5 Million estimate, but Allakaket Airlines had an excellent year, so it didn't hurt their bottom line. The townspeople pitched in and volunteered their spare time, which reduced costs by 1/3.

Finally, they erected a steel building on top of the shelter that stored the armory, the M -163 Vulcan, and the Rapier anti-air systems. They were going to store explosives in the armory, so they build a room inside the steel building made out of Concrete Masonry Units reinforced with concrete and rebar, and a reinforced concrete roof with blast vents so if there was an accidental explosion, the blast would be diverted out the roof instead of taking out the Vulcan and the Rapier, or damaging the rest of the armory. Cases of ammo were stored on shelves by caliber and type. Explosive ammo and missiles were stored in the concrete block room with the rest of the explosives. There were racks of rifles along a wall, along with Alice gear and bullet-proof vests. The Supply Sergeant at Elmendorf chose to retire from the Air Force, and was hired by Allakaket Airlines to maintain the Armory and the shelter. He still kept his connections at Elmendorf, which saved Allakaket Airlines millions of dollars by acquiring surplus equipment instead of new. His first day on the job was an eye-opener to say the least, he thought that Allakaket Airlines was better armed than the security force at Elmendorf, and in

certain areas, they were. They didn't have any Bradleys or Armor, but they weren't done yet!

General Shepard decided to pay a visit when Bear told him the shelter and Armory was done. He was getting ready to retire, and knew he wouldn't get promoted again, so he was thinking about re-locating to Allakaket since they were almost as well prepared as an Air Force base to withstand attack, or survive any SHTF scenario. When he got there, he was impressed, and made a few suggestions, and offered some more equipment they were missing - no, they didn't get any nuclear cruise missiles - it wasn't time yet!

Ron got called up by the General while he was in Allakaket. They were ready for him to test the improved Bradley and the improved LAV. If he could fly back with the General, they could talk in the plane on the way over to MacDill. Ron packed a bag with enough clothes for a week, and made sure that his emergency kit was in his bag, checked his P-14, spare mags, Federal CCW and his TS ID badge were still on him. He kissed Nancy goodbye, hugged the kids, and was out the door in half an hour - he didn't want to keep the General waiting. They flew back to Elmendorf in 007, Ron's S-76 super-copter, and then got on board the general's VC-20 for the flight to MacDill. Once they were airborne, General Shepard leveled with him.

"Ron, I'm all ready to retire. I deliberately sent you enough stuff to fight WWIII since I wanted to retire to Allakaket if you'll have me. I'm tired of the BS, and just want to relax. With the new security measures I've installed, Allakaket is almost as secure as MacDill, except you don't have USMC guards. I've requested retirement, and my last project will be to see the Robo-tank and the Robo-LAV completed and produced. The engineers claim they got all the bugs out, and think you might be able to hit a small target at 3 miles now that they got the turret balanced and isolated the vibrations. Both prototypes are under wraps at MacDill, waiting for you to test them. If you say they're good to go, the Pentagon will cancel all existing contracts for the Bushmaster equipped Bradley and the LAV series, and replace them with Robo-guns. The good news is they can use existing hulls with several modifications, so they might even retrofit existing Bradleys and LAV's, saving even more money. This is the culmination of a long project, so I need your honest opinion."

"General, I've never given you anything but my honest opinion, and I'm not about to stop now. I've got a problem with Northrop Grumman. Seems I've pissed them off by costing them 35 million in excess charges on the SuperGoose project. One of their test pilots tried to entrap me by pumping me for information about the RCAF procurement of the SuperGoose. I turned the tables on him and tape-recorded his admission that Northrop Grumman has been charging a 700% markup on projects, and giving half of it back to Politicians in the form of kick-backs and political contributions. I've got the tape in a safe spot. Could you give me some help and get Northrop Grumman off my back. I can handle threats to myself, but I'm afraid they might go after my wife and kids."

"Ron, what did you say the name of that test pilot was?"

"It was the weirdest thing - he said his name was Keith Northrop, and I thought it was a little funny to have a grandson of the owners doing something as dangerous as a test pilot."

"You were right, All of Jack Northrop's relatives wouldn't be let anywhere near a prototype aircraft. What else happened?

"Jack Snyder met me at the helicopter pad on the roof of the El Segundo facility, he introduced himself as the program director, and we flew to Edwards to meet Keith and fly the SuperGoose."

"You said Jack Snyder - he's not a program director, he's their head of Internal Security and a total snake. I think this whole T&E thing was set up to set you up and get you to say something incriminating."

"That's my gut feeling, the plane wasn't even wired for sensors like they'd normally do in a test series."

"I'll bet they tried to pump you, and when you wouldn't spill your guts, they gave up for now. You might have an expert check your clothes for bugs. If you stayed at their hotel, they would have had ample time to plant a bug on you."

Ron thought back to what he was wearing when he was in California, called BA on his cell phone, and told him to grab Bear and tell him to go to his house with testing equipment, and go through a list of clothes searching for bugs. Ron was royally pissed now, what if he said something while wearing their bugs. "General, a bug's a transmitter, right - what's the range of one of those bugs?"

"I see what you're getting at, usually no more than a mile. If they wanted to bug you, they either had to plant a recorder within a mile, or else have an operator in the area. Since the tapes need to be switched, they needed an operator on the inside."

Ron called BA back. "Have we hired anyone since the snafu with the RCAF?"

"Just a couple."

"Run a deep background check on them, then let Bear talk to them, we might have an industrial spy on our hands, or a hit man!"

"In that case, I'll incarcerate them right now until Bear clears them."

A couple of hours later, BA called back "Ron, they checked out, and Bear didn't find anything. Maybe we dodged a bullet."

Ron told the general what BA had told him. The general wasn't satisfied, he knew these kind of operatives had legends that could stand up under close scrutiny. He asked Ron for the phone, and told BA to have Bear put someone reliable on them 24/7. BA agreed, then hung up. They talked for the rest of the flight, mostly strategy on how to defeat any attempt by Northrop Grumman to cause Ron grief. General Shepard hoped he was being paranoid, then remembered a famous quote "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't out to get you!" He used his "shoe phone" to make a contact with an Ex-Seal that worked for several alphabet agencies as a free-lancer. He left a cryptic message on his answering machine, and hung up. If anyone could dissuade Northrop Grumman from causing Ron problems, this gentleman could, and he owed the General a few favors.

Chapter 31 - Robo-Gun II

They landed at MacDill later that day, and the general told Ron to get some sleep, he had a busy week ahead, then dropped him off at the VIP quarters. He went up to his room, took a shower, and went straight to bed. At 0700 the next morning, he was up, dressed, and headed for breakfast. Steve met him there at 0800, and gave him a ride to the firing range. They had the Robo-Tank (Bradley) set up for the short-range moving target test. They wanted to do the entire test series over again to make sure their fixes didn't mess anything up. Ron read the manual, realized there were no significant changes to the gun or the software, and set the RT up for target and track mode, then made sure the range was clear, and activated the range. The gun behaved identically as the last time, but Ron's score improved since more of the shots were in the kill zone, and he was acquiring them faster now that he was familiar with the system. They shut down the RT, checked the targets, and Ron had a perfect score. Everything out to a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile was dead. They reset the range, and Ron re-configured the RT for long-range T&T mode with the outriggers down. When he was finished, he had a perfect score again, with all targets within a mile dead. Next he asked for static targets at 1,2, and 3 miles at his 6, 9 and 12 o'clock. When these targets were set up, he activated Sniper Mode, and engaged the targets from left to right starting at his 6 o'clock. He put 5 rounds into each target without re-aiming after the first shot on the target. Just as he guessed, the groups opened up as the range increased but the groups were circular, indicating no major harmonics were interfering with the gun's accuracy. The 1-mile targets averaged a 3-inch group, the 2-mile targets averaged a 6-inch group, and the 3-mile targets averaged a 9-inch group for 5 shots per target without re-aiming. The first shot of each group was in the bulls-eye, and the 1-mile targets had X-ring groups. Any Enemy General within a mile would be dead as a doornail. Anyone within 2 miles would probably be dead, and anyone within 3 miles would be wishing they were dead. The only thing Ron needed to do with the Bradley RT was conduct the tests at night. Since they had the time and the ammo, he asked if the Sergeant would mind driving the tank while he shot, just to see how far they could engage and hit targets while moving. For the rest of the afternoon, they drove back and forth, and engaged targets from 100 yards to 1 mile. Everything within half a mile had a better than 80% chance of getting hit with the first shot at up to 30mph, and everything within a quarter-mile had a 100% hit ratio at full speed, the same as the existing Bradley. His hit ratio at targets outside $\frac{1}{2}$ mile was a miserable 30%, but until now, the Bushmaster-equipped Bradley wouldn't even think about engaging targets more than a quarter-mile away while moving. Ron jumped out, and was typing like mad while his impressions were still fresh.

They drove him back to the VIP quarters, where he ate a late lunch/early dinner and took a nap. He got up at 2030, and Steve picked him up at 2100 hours and drove to the range. They did the whole procedure with the night settings, with comparable results. Just like last time, there was no difference between day and night with the new camera and software. The only problem they had was the Sergeant wasn't familiar enough with the displays to feel comfortable driving at speed at night using just the monitors, so the testing speed was limited to 20 mph. Ron finished

at 0100, and went to bed. It would take them until 1000 to set up the range and move the RT LAV into position. Ron was glad he could sleep in to 0900.

The next morning, Ron ate a big breakfast, because yesterday by the time he got fed again, he was really hungry. Steve showed up at 0950 to drive him to the range. Ron was impressed by the LAV-25, which was 30% bigger in all dimensions than the Bradley and fully amphibious. Installing the Robo-Gun actually increased room inside the cramped hull, which would make the Jarheads happy. He was given a familiarization briefing on the idiosyncrasies of the LAV-25. With its wheeled chassis, it had a higher ground clearance, and was less stable than the Bradley, so he shouldn't expect the same accuracy from the LAV-25 until the outriggers were deployed. The designers of the LAV decided to go with much heavier outriggers that fully supported the weight of the LAV, which meant that once the outriggers were deployed, the gun should be accurate out to 3 miles, which they hoped would make up for the lack of accuracy without the outriggers deployed. They hoped it would still be better than the original Bushmaster, and Ron had to agree that it should, based on his experience with the Bradley. The accuracy using only the suspension locks was disappointing, and anything outside of a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile had a fairly good chance of surviving, since they could only manage a 50% kill rate. It could hit targets all day long out to a mile, but the suspension system had too much flexibility in it to guarantee a kill outside of $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile.

With the outriggers down, however, the Robo-gun performed like it was attached to a block of concrete. The T&T session with the outriggers down was amazing. He was killing moving targets at 2-mile range like the Bradley was killing targets at a mile. Anything inside a mile was a guaranteed kill. Next he set up the 6, 9, and 12 pattern but extended it out to 5 miles just for giggles. They reloaded the ammo trays, and Ron fired 5 shots at each target without re-aiming once he fired the first shot at each target. The average group size was smaller for the whole series, and there was no distortion of the groups due to any perceived harmonics. The 1-mile targets averaged just under 2 inches, the 2-mile just under 4, and the 3-mile just under 6, The 4 and 5 mile targets were 8 and 10 inches respectively, but with some vertical stringing., probably due to the extreme range. It was still good to know that the gun could shoot a 10-inch group at 5 miles, and the first round from each group was in the bullseye. He hopped out of the LAV and quickly dictated his thoughts, then had the range set up for moving target/moving vehicle tests. The LAV performed dismally in Ron's opinion, but could still get a first-shot kill out to a $\frac{1}{4}$ mile below 30 mph. At half a mile, they were still getting disabling shots, and were lucky to hit targets past a half-mile while moving. He didn't blame the gun, since the Bradley did much better. He realized that a wheeled vehicle would have much more freedom of movement due to the suspension and the tires. He wrote his other report up, and was told to hit the sack so they could do the night-time tests at 2100 that evening. He ate a quick meal and went right to bed. He set an alarm for 2030, and met Steve at 2035 still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. The night test was a no-brainer, and again they had problems driving faster than 20mph at night due to the sergeant's unfamiliarity with the vehicle. Again they had problems without the outriggers, but with them the gun was amazingly accurate. They called it a night at 0100, and he went to sleep for 12 hours before they would get back together at 1500 the next day to write

the report.

On his way back to the VIP quarters, Ron thought of something, and asked Steve. "If the LAV with the outriggers is capable of engaging targets out to 5 miles, wouldn't it benefit more from a higher magnification scope than the Bradley, which can only engage targets out to maybe 3 miles with its lighter outriggers."

Steve stopped the Hummer, grabbed his tape recorder, and asked Ron to repeat what he just said, then handed him the tape, and told him to give it to the T&E team tomorrow. Steve dropped Ron off at the VIP quarters, where he ate a bologna and cheese sandwich and went to bed. He got up around noon, and they were still serving lunch, so Ron hurried down to the cafeteria and piled a plate full of food, then went back upstairs to his room when he finished eating, and took a shower and a quick nap. He woke up at 1400, got dressed, remembered the tape, and pocketed it. Steve was waiting downstairs, and drove him to the Gunny's office. The team was assembled, and Ron handed Gunny the tape, and had him play it. The engineers felt like smacking their foreheads it was so obvious. The head of the design team said that increasing the maximum magnification could be done fairly easily using electronics, since the lens was way bigger than it needed to be for daylight imaging. The nighttime system might not be able to use the full magnification without washing out the image, but it would be worth having during the day. They wrote up their report with their recommendations, including increasing the magnification digitally, especially for the LAV version. When they were finished, Steve drove up and told Ron that General Shepard wanted to see him and to bring a copy of the T&E report. Steve dropped Ron off, and walked back to his office. Ron knocked on General Shepard's door, and he said "Enter" so Ron opened the door. "General Shepard, you asked to see me?"

"Ron, sit down and close the door." After he closed the door and sat down the General continued. "Ron, I've got good news and great news. First of all, thanks for a job well done. Steve told me about your idea to increase the magnification on the LAV. I was thinking, can you imagine what a threat a LAV-25 could be to a lightly armored force if it was dug into a revetment with only the turret exposed and its outriggers extended. The only visible target is the gun and the small turret, they can't acoustically or visually locate the gun because of the suppressor, and it's killing APCs at a 5-mile range. Even a medium tank would be vulnerable. A Main Battle Tank could be damaged at least. All armored troops would have to be buttoned up, restricting their view and their situational awareness. No senior officer would dare make himself a target on the battlefield in case there was a Robo-Tank hiding somewhere. That by itself would demoralize enemy troops that love to see their generals up front. Just that observation could be the most important thing you did all week. We thoroughly expected the Bradley to be more accurate with the outriggers up, but didn't realize that the LAV with the outriggers down would be so accurate. Thanks for doing the moving vehicle/moving target test. It's not part of the program, but the data is still valuable. Based on your report, I'm going to recommend to the Pentagon that the Robo-tank go into full production for the Bradley as it exists, and suggest a change order for the optics for the LAV series to increase the

magnification to take advantage of it's stability with the outriggers down.”

“I've got some better news for you. You never were targeted for any espionage by Northrop Grumman upper Management. This was a solo operation run out of Jack Snyder's office. Evidently one of the tech-reps at NG got a little mouthy about what they thought of you, and Jack thought that if he could freelance an operation and get you to spill the beans, he'd get promoted. Since the operation failed, they've taken no further action against you, and you never were bugged or tailed. My guess is you're in the clear, so you've nothing to worry about.”

“Thanks General, that makes me feel better.”

“I've put in for my retirement, and as a retirement present, the Air Force wanted to give me a Robo-tank as either a Bradley or the LAV. Since I'm moving to Allakaket, I wanted to know which one you thought I should get, since you know which one would work best up there.”

“General, I'd highly suggest you get the Bradley, since there aren't many 5-mile clearings in Alaska, at least around Allakaket. Also the tracks would be easier to adapt to working in deep snow than the wheeled version.”

“That's what I thought too. I'm shipping one last shipment of ammo, weapons and anything else I think you might need up there before I retire. Was there anything you wanted that you don't have yet?”

“General, we don't have any heavy anti-tank missiles like the AT-4, TOW, or Dragon. If you could spare a couple of ballistic Hummers, say 2 TOW armed Hummers, and 2 Ma Deuce armed Hummers with a full set of reloads, that would cover it.”

“I think we can handle that - anything else?”

“Bear wanted to ask me to ask you if we could have any nuclear cruise missiles!”

General Shepard roared with laughter, and told Ron “You tell that overgrown aquatic freak that it still isn't time yet - OK!”

“Yes Sir General Sir!”

“Better yet, I'll tell him myself!” The General opened his shoe phone, and dialed Bear's number.

Bear must have been tired because he answered “Chief Simmons, this is an unsecured line”

“Bear, I've got a friend of yours here, and I decided to give you my answer personally; No, you

hairy overgrown aquatic freak, it isn't time yet!"

Bear and General Shepard were both laughing their heads off when Bear answered "Aye, Aye Sir!"

"Bear, how's things in Allakaket?"

"Quiet as a church on Wednesday morning."

The General and Bear had set up a code for use over unsecured phone lines. Bear's reply indicated that things really were quiet, and everything was OK. If he had mentioned Thursday, something was wrong, and if he said Friday, TSHTF, or it was about to. Saturday meant something was really wrong - like he might be a hostage. The General was glad that Bear was still using the code after all these years. OPSEC didn't stop when you hung up the uniform. He told Bear he would talk to him later and hung up.

"Ok Ron, You can either stay in VIP quarters and catch an early morning flight back to Alaska, or we can fly you out tonight and you'll probably have to stay overnight in Anchorage."

"General, if it's all the same to you, I'd like to stay here, the food's better, and I might get to spend some time with Steve. It might be a while before I see him again."

"Ron, keep this under your hat, but Steve's put in for his retirement as well. We both want to retire to Allakaket. I've taken some measures to ensure that the military hardware and the 007 helicopters stay in Allakaket when I retire, so Steve decided to join me. It will take a couple of months for the paperwork to process, then we're Hasta la Vista Baby! We're both bachelors, but Bear told us there are some really nice Inuit women in Allakaket that aren't too picky about their husbands, and they actually have all their teeth!"

Ron remembered his conversation with Bear, and started laughing. "General, that was Bear's first question, about their teeth."

General, maybe I should make some phone calls and let BA know so we can prepare some houses for you."

"Ron, like I said, keep it under your hat means don't tell even BA. Whatever you have available will be perfect. We're used to BOQ, so even a trailer in town will be an improvement. If word of our retirement got out prematurely before its official, it might undo all the stuff I've been doing for the last couple of months."

"Ok General, any thing else?"

"I'm sure you'll see something extra in your Christmas stocking this year - now beat it, I've got

work to do!"

Ron shook the General's hand, and closed the door on his way out. He walked down the hall to Steve's office, and plopped down in his spare chair to wait for him to get un-busy. "What brings you here?"

"The General sends his regards, and I'm staying overnight so I can fly out early tomorrow."

"Ok Ron, I've got a mountain of paperwork, but I'll catch you later this evening." Steve called for a driver to take Ron wherever he wanted to go. "Steve, can you call Gunny at the range, I wanted to get in some pistol practice."

"Sure Ron."

2 minutes later "Gunny Smith, this is an unsecured line."

"Gunny, Col. Fellows, Ron Williams would like to know if you were OK for some pistol practice?"

"Sure, have him meet me at the armory."

"Thanks Gunny."

"Gunny will meet you at the armory - see you later."

Ron walked outside and a driver was waiting for him in a Hummer. Ron told him to drive to the Armory. When he pulled up, Gunny was sitting there with a big grin on his face. "Col. Fellows said you want some pistol practice, care to try our pop-up range again?"

"I was hoping you had that available. Do you have any .45 acp FMJ practice ammo?"

"I've got about 10 cases; it's the Special Forces favorite caliber."

Gunny grabbed a partial case, and said "Follow Me" and walked out to his Hummer. They drove over to "Hogan's Alley" and Ron took his P-14 out of the holster, unloaded all 3 mags, and reloaded with the 230gr. FMJ ammo, then stuck the gun back in it's holster, and the spare mags back in the mag carrier. The Gunny set up the system for an expert semi-auto pistol shooter, since he remembered Ron almost cleaned house on him the last time he shot the MP-5 on the course. Gunny handed Ron a noise-reducing headset that would also allow him to hear everything around him. Ron nodded that he was ready, and Gunny gave him a thumbs up, and pressed a hidden button. A buzzer went off, and targets started popping up all over the place. Ron went into overdrive, putting a round into each target as it appeared. He shot the gun dry, thumbed the magazine release while he reached for his first spare, and did a perfect combat

reload. It cost him over a second, so now he was behind the curve, and had to hurry up. He was reaching for his 3rd magazine when the “You’re dead” buzzer sounded. A mover had slid behind cover while he was reloading. Gunny was pretty impressed, he’d killed 28 targets before he ran out of ammo, and a slow reload cost him the race. Ron safed the gun and they sat down and talked. Ron told Gunny about his experience at the wedding, having to draw from concealment while shoving the groom out of the line of fire.

“Ron, we have people assigned as bodyguards for military VIPs coming through here all the time, and they practice that exact scenario. The only thing you didn’t do right, and Nancy covered for you, was you didn’t do a Failure to Stop drill. Whenever someone is armed with a full-auto weapon, you automatically shoot them in the forehead just to make sure, because if they squeeze that trigger before they are dead, they can kill a whole bunch of people. If you’re seriously into using a pistol for self-defense, you really need to practice your FTS drill more. I can configure the range for that. It won’t be as many targets, but they won’t go down until you have 2 in the 10-ring center chest, and 1 in the forehead. OK, while you reload, I’ll configure the system.” Gunny knew that Ron had a 14-round magazine, so he configured the system to give him 4 FTS targets, a 2 second pause, then 4 more. If he was still in the game, it would give him a 3rd set after a 2 second pause. Gunny looked up, and Ron was finished reloading, and was in the process of putting his hearing protection on. This time Ron took his time to catch his breath, and calm his nerves. Finally he looked at Gunny, nodded, and got a thumbs-up. Ron’s head swivelled forward, and a buzzer sounded. Ron drew and fired Bang-Bang..Bang. 1 target down. As soon as he was finished, another popped up on the opposite side of the “street” since the Hogan’s alley was configured for the SF nightmare, house to house in a built-up city. Ron’s front sight locked on the center of the chest of the second target, and Bang-Bang...Bang, two down. He made it through the first group of four, realized he was short, dropped his magazine and stuffed a fresh mag in the magazine well, and kept shooting just as the next target popped up. He got 2 more when the buzzer sounded. He’d missed the forehead of the guy who popped out of the second story window. Gunny consoled him, saying that most people shoot high when aiming much higher than themselves with a pistol. “Someone has taught you tactics and strategy since the last time you were here, I noticed you just didn’t take them out left to right, which is the quickest way, but you eliminated them in threat order. We have a feature in the program to assign targets a threat level, and modify the exposure time accordingly. Would you like to take a run through that way? It will take a while to set up, because I need to change the targets so they show different weapons.”

“Go ahead Gunny, I need to reload and catch my breath, I’m not as young as I used to be.”

Half an hour later, Gunny said he was ready. Ron had reloaded his magazines, and put on his Wolf Ears (he found out that was the brand name of his hearing protectors - he wanted to buy a bunch of them so they could use them at their range in Allakaket.) When he was all set, he told Gunny he was ready. Gunny said “Wait for the beep, then draw.” 3 seconds later, the beeper sounded, and Ron drew and engaged the closest target, armed with a 12 gauge shotgun. He put 3 quick rounds into it, then swivelled and engaged a pop-up that had a carbine with 3 quick

rounds. He heard the actuator to his left, but it was a knife-wielding thug, who was 20 yards away. The next target appeared right after it, it was a kid holding an AK-47. Ron triple-tapped that target, then swung back to engage the knife. Gunny nodded his approval behind Ron's back. Right as he finished off the knife-wielder, a rifleman appeared at a window almost 50 yards away. Ron didn't have time to be pretty, but managed somehow to hit the target in the forehead because that was all of the rifleman that was exposed. He ducked behind "cover" and quickly reloaded, and then resumed his scan before coming all the way out from behind the cover. Good thing, because he was in the crosshairs of another rifleman across the street, and if he came out during his reload, he was dead. Instead, Ron fired 3 quick rounds at the rifleman, and managed to get a kill shot to the chest. By now his heart was pumping and his pulse was racing, this felt like real life. He had 11 rounds left, and he didn't know how many bad guys. Before he cleared the cover, he took his remaining mag and moved it to his left-front pants pocket. Gunny thought that was smart, because the last time he had trouble getting that last mag out of the concealed mag carrier. He'd make sure to recommend a different mag carrier to him when this was through.

Ron looked around, didn't hear or see anything, so he quickly ran to the next "cover" instead of standing out in the street. Gunny thought "Now he's learning". He heard a pop-up to his right, and it was another kid with an AK-47. The rule on the range was if it was visibly armed it was a target, since this was a military range. On a civilian Politically correct Range, some armed kids would be "no shoots". Ron thought that was stupid. He wasn't paid to arrest anyone, and if they were armed, they were a potential lethal threat. As soon as he waxed the kid, another target popped up, a woman wearing a skimpy bikini carrying a shotgun. Gunny found that sometimes men didn't know what to do with this target. Ron had no problem shooting her, and he realized he had 5 rounds left, so after engaging his next target, he could fire 2 quick shots, then he had to reload. He looked around, and there was some more "cover" 10 feet to his right, but close to a door. He looked to his left, and there was better cover to his left, but it was 20 feet away. As he started running to his left, he saw the doorway open, and a MZB holding a shotgun appeared out the door. If he had gone right, the shotgun would have gotten him. He pumped 3 quick rounds into the MZB, then dove for cover. Since no targets were active, he did a tactical reload and kept the magazine with the 2 rounds he might need later. Suddenly 3 targets popped up in front of him, all carrying shotguns within 15 feet. He put 1 round into each, and 2 were still standing so he shot them both in the head, and they went down. He had 10 rounds left, plus 2 in the spare mag. He looked around, and he was almost to the "safe zone" at the end of the street. There was 1 more piece of cover between there and where he was, so since no targets were up, he ran to the cover. While he ran, 2 targets popped up, and he engaged them "en passant" and took them out each with a point-blank head shot. Gunny thought "Dang, this kid's good!" Finally he slid to a stop behind the last cover to catch his breath. 10 seconds later, he heard the dreaded sound of actuators, and looked up. There were 3 more targets, all armed and 15 feet away. He put 1 round into each, and 1 was still standing, so he shot it again, and it fell. Since he was behind cover, he decided to take the 2 rounds out of his magazine, and top off the other magazine. It took almost a minute, but he didn't hear any actuators, so he wasn't in any danger. He had 4 rounds left, he hoped Gunny was out of targets! As he looked

around the corner, he heard an actuator, and spotted a distant target covering the goal line, with a carbine. He had 4 rounds, and if he didn't kill it, he lost. He took a braced kneeling position behind the barrier, lined up the sights and fired. He knew he hit it, but it didn't go down. Remembering the FTS drill, he aimed for the head, held his breath, blew half of it out and squeezed the trigger as the front sight steadied on the MZB's head. The target dropped right after he fired, and he ran for the goal line, since he only had 2 rounds left. He crossed the goal line before he heard any actuators, so he knew he had won. He unloaded and safed the weapon, and stuck it back in his holster. Gunny walked up to him with a big grin on his face. "Ron, that was the best I'd seen ever from a civilian. I've got to know who taught you."

"Gunny, it was Bear, I mean Chief Simmons."

"I thought you had been trained by a SEAL, because they teach you "Nothing fancy, just kill the SOB!" Ron laughed his head off, because that was exactly what Bear had said, practically word for word.

Ron and Gunny examined the targets and talked strategy. Gunny agreed with most of Ron's decisions, but not all of them, but in the end he had to admit that they passed the final test- they worked in combat, or as close as they could simulate it. Ron reloaded his P-14 and his mags with his Cor-Bon 200gr JHP "Flying Ashcan" carry ammo, loaded the P-14, topped off the magazine, then stuck the other 2 in his concealed carry double mag carrier. Gunny remembered he was going to mention that.

"Uh Ron - I forgot, remember how many problems you had with your second reload?"

Ron vaguely remembered having a problem getting the second mag out of the double carrier a couple of times, and nodded sheepishly to Gunny.

"Just a suggestion, but you should switch to 2 or 3 single mag carriers carried next to each other. Seems the Kydex doubles let one mag out easy, but twist and torque too much when you try to remove the second mag. Besides, if you get single mag carriers, you can almost carry 3 mags in the space it took to carry 2, but much more comfortably."

"How so Gunny?"

"Think about it, 2 mags with no flexibility, or 3 mags that can flex between them - which is going to be more comfortable?"

"OK Gunny, when I get home I'll order some."

"I can do better than that, I'll trade you 5 single mag carriers and 2 spare mags for your P-14 for your double carrier, and I even have some more Flying Ashcan ammo in stock to reload them. As big as you are, you might be able to carry 5 singles strategically located."

They walked into the armory, and Gunny pulled 5 brand new double-stack Kydex mag carriers still in their plastic wrap, 2 P-14 Magazines still in their wrappers, and 2 boxes of Flying Ashcan ammo out of stock. Ron loosened his belt, unclipped the double mag carrier, and Gunny told him where to hide the 4 mags. He suggested 3 behind his left kidney since he was right-handed and 1 right in front of his holster, and to keep the other one for a spare until he got used to carrying 4, and then stick it in front on the left side. He said it wouldn't be as comfortable when he sat down, but if TS ever HTF, he'd be glad to have the extra mags of ammo so he wouldn't have to waste time topping off mags from a partial, because the bad guys rarely waited while you said "Wait a minute, I'm reloading!" Ron got to laugh his head off again, Gunny was funny. Maybe when he retired he should become a stand-up comedian.

Ron thought 5 mags was a bit excessive, then remembered what Bear had told him "When you run out of ammo, that expensive gun becomes a very expensive club or hammer. Make sure you carry enough." Gunny just proved that point with the scenario, he almost ran out of ammo, and had to resort to topping off his mag, which is a tactical no-no because it takes too long. It turned out he didn't need those last 2 rounds, but he didn't know that at the time. When they were finished, Gunny drove Ron to the VIP quarters, then said he had to get back to work. Ron was still getting used to the 4 single mags when he went to dinner, but people carrying guns was nothing new around there, so no one said anything. Steve came up to his room after dinner, and Ron showed him what Gunny had done. Steve started laughing and making cracks about "Rambo" until Ron told him about the shoot-out at the wedding, and the results of that afternoon's pistol practice. He had almost run out of ammo, and had to resort to topping off a mag from a partial to complete the course. Steve studied Ron carefully, and he really couldn't see the mags or the holster with Ron's shirt down over it. Ron had filled out since the last time Steve had seen him, and he was built like an NFL linebacker, big and powerful. Steve knew Ron didn't lift weights, but knew from cutting and splitting wood last time he was there that making firewood was a good substitute. He remembered his brother Ron was fairly big and rangy, so he must have gotten his physique from their side of the family, or else Roy was the runt of his family. Ron told Steve they'd have to cut it short, he needed to get some sleep. Steve sat Ron down and told him he put in for his retirement, and wanted to join General Shepard in Allakaket. Ron admitted that General Shepard had already told him, but not to tell anyone, since it might jeopardize some stuff he was working on. Steve agreed, he was just giving Ron a head's up. Steve gave Ron a big hug, and said he would see him tomorrow.

Chapter 32 - Homecoming

The next morning Ron got up early, showered and dressed, and ate breakfast all before 0800, since his flight was at 0900. Steve showed up at 0830 to drive him to the VIP terminal. Ron showed his Federal CCW to the Air Police, and they waved him around the metal detector, and pointed him to the correct VC-20. His ID was checked by the crew chief before boarding, and the chief carried his luggage aboard. 4 hours later, he was in Anchorage, and when they landed at Elmendorf, Bear was there to greet him with 007. "Your carriage awaits, sir!"

"Well, what's it a-waiting for, let's go!"

Once they were airborne back to Allakaket, Bear said "Santa Claus came early" and handed Ron a list of all the stuff General Shepard shipped. It was basically a couple of boxcar loads of ammo, rockets, grenades, missiles, and a bunch of other stuff. The piece de resistance was the 2 additional M -163 Vulcan Guns, and a boxcar load of 20mm ammo he sent. Also the 4 Hummers showed up, 2 with BMG Ma Deuces, and 2 with TOW launchers. They were even the ballistically armored Hummers, and there were several dozen TOW missiles for the Hummers.

Ron read the note:

Ho - Ho- Ho...Guess Who!

Hope you enjoy the toys!

GS

Ron was glad all this stuff came while he was gone, it might have been fun to unload all those heavy lift choppers. The S-76 dropped Bear off at his place, then flew Ron to Allakaket. He checked the armory, and if they had any more room for stuff, he couldn't find it. He guessed they had more ammo than most bases did. He found out later he was right.

Ron drove home and was jumped by Josh and Jake, then Moose finished the dog pile. Sarah was just starting to walk, and toddled on over to Daddy. They played together for a while on the wood floor, then Nancy said that dinner was ready. Ron thought "Saved by the Bell" and went in to face feeding time at the zoo. Josh and Jake took care of themselves, except Ron felt like if he would have just hosed the two of them off after dinner, it would have taken less time. Sarah was starting to take after her brothers, but still needed help. David was easy, and ate whatever Mom decided to feed him. Moose ate a bowl of dog food while he still had time. When they finished, Moose Jake, Josh and Sarah went into the playroom, and David took a nap while Mom and Dad ate in the few minutes of peace they would have.

“So I hope you’re home for a while?”

“I just finished my last T&E session, so unless they come up with something else for me to do, it’s back to being a full-time husband, and part-time businessman, unless BA needs me to fly, and I doubt it since we still have that reserve plane and pilot available.”

“Good, because I have a long list of honey-do’s for you!”

Ron groaned, he wasn’t even 30 years old, and he dreaded the “honey-do” list. Ron was glad for 1 thing, he could put the list off until tomorrow. He and Nancy caught up on everything going on with their family, and things in Allakaket. Finally it was time to put the kids to bed, and catch up on quality time.

The next morning after breakfast, Ron decided to tackle the “honey-do” list. He saw the first item was to chop and split wood, so he called his friendly handyman for help. Half an hour later, they were out sawing down enough trees to re-fill his wood pile, then they used the tractor to drag the logs over to his sawhorse to saw them into lengths. Finally the wedge and sledge split the wood to the right size, and they stacked it up. So much for Day #1! When Ron went inside at the end of the day, he was sore, so Nancy told him to take a hot shower. Minutes later she joined him, and gave him a massage in the shower, except it did anything but relax him. They took care of that little problem a few minutes later. Once they got dressed again, Ron played with the kids while Nancy finished dinner. When she announced dinner was ready, he helped her feed the kids, then they sat down to eat. Later, they were snuggling on the couch when Jake, Josh, and Sarah decided to join them. Moose wanted to get into the act, but Ron wasn’t having anything to do with it. Moose laid on his bearskin rug, which immediately filled up with 3 kids. Ron and Nancy had the couch to themselves again.

Later, Nancy said it was bath time, and she recommended that Ron get into a swimsuit and put on goggles, since the 3 Amigos splashed a lot. Nancy filled a tub full of warm water and bubble bath, then the 2 of them supervised “Bath Time” and wound up almost as wet as the kids. Ron grabbed Josh to dry him off, and almost got peed on. Luckily, he had anticipated the Fountain of Youth, and quickly got him situated over the toilet. He hoped Jake and Sarah had better manners. Once they were all dried and in their PJs it was time for bed. Ron took the rare opportunity to read them a bedtime story. Nancy stood in the doorway taking in the scene of the 3 of them seated on the bed listening intently to their dad. When he finished, Nancy picked up Sarah to return her to her own bedroom, and Ron picked up Jake and moved him to his bed then tucked them in. He said a quick prayer over each of his sons, then walked into Sarah’s room and prayed over her too. Mom and Dad finally got to bed, and Ron just held Nancy while they talked and prayed about their day.

The next morning after breakfast, Ron resumed his chores when Nancy said he had a phone call. He walked in from the garden, and it was the General Glasgow of the RCAF.

“Ron, your SuperGoose is done, and waiting at Wing 19 in Vancouver for you.”

“Did they do the avionics upgrade?”

“Far as I know Ron, we ordered it, so they should have done it.”

General, I need to ask a favor, and this has to stay confidential. Can they sweep the plane for any bugs or unauthorized transmitters?”

“Sure, why?”

“General, I’m sure you remember that project I’m involved in, and if the plane were bugged, it would be a major security breach, and I don’t trust Northrop Grumman as far as I can throw them!”

“I can understand that - they’re probably still steaming from when you called them on that financial shenanigans. I’ll have a couple of security experts go over the plane with a fine tooth comb. It will take a while, because there are a bunch of authorized transmitters on the aircraft.”

“General, if I could make a suggestion, you’re probably looking for a voice activated bug, or a device spliced into the headsets.”

“Thanks for the tip Ron, you’re probably right. I’ll call you when it’s done.”

Ron went back to work, and General Glasgow called in a couple of favors to get a couple of experts to search the entire plane for bugs or transmitters. He made the suggestion to look for VOX or splices into the headset line. 2 days later, they called back, and said they found a VOX connected to a digital recorder that wasn’t in the other units. Instead of removing it, they deactivated it, and stuck a tracker on it, so if the unit was removed from the plane, it could be located. The General asked them to check the other SuperGoose airplanes delivered to the Canadian Government. Only the ones going to potentially sensitive government agencies had the device, so the General was highly suspicious. Instead of calling Northrop/Grumman and canceling the entire order, he authorized a sting operation, and had the operatives do the same thing to the recorders in the bugged planes, so if the disk or the recorder was removed for any reason, they’d be able to track it and bust whoever was behind it for Espionage.

He sent an E-mail to General Shepard detailing his findings. General Shepard ordered a search of all VIP aircraft in the fleet for this device, and found some more. He called General Glasgow back on his shoe phone, and told him what he had found. Evidently someone in the aircraft industry wanted to branch out into the espionage business. General Shepard had a short list of suspects, and Jack Snyder was at the top of his list! This was a major espionage case, which involved both governments, so General Shepard suggested to General Glasgow that he contact a friend of his in the FBI Counterintelligence bureau, who could check into this without warning

the suspect, because Jack Snyder was Ex-CIA, and had connections there and the NSA to warn him about any sting. General Shepard wanted to get Jack Snyder for more reasons than one. One of the reasons he was Ex-CIA was that they suspected he leaked critical information to the Chinese for money, but they didn't have enough evidence to convict. So instead of airing their dirty laundry and maybe not getting a conviction, they unceremoniously kicked his scrawny butt out of the CIA without a pension. General Shepard called his buddy at the FBI and got the ball rolling. General Glasgow called Ron and told him that they found and deactivated a digital recorder, and put a tracer on it in case someone was to take it out of the plane. Ron thanked him, and asked if the plane were ready to pick up. General Glasgow said it would be ready to pick up first thing tomorrow. Ron thanked him, and hung up. He called Steve, his relief pilot, and told him to get ready for a dawn patrol flight to Vancouver BC to pick up a SuperGoose, then he told Nancy the good news, leaving out the details about the bug.

The next morning, they flew to Vancouver, and Steve dropped Ron off and flew back to Allakaket, since he wanted to make a pickup that afternoon that was pretty urgent - his wife was flying back home from visiting relatives, and he wanted to fly her home from Anchorage. Chief Nichols met Ron and told him the SuperGoose was ready to go. They'd already done all the check flights, and the mechanics told him that this plane had at least 30% more horsepower than the TurboGoose, and the extended fuselage and the new tail actually made it handle better. They even tried extending the floor ramp during flight, and it didn't disturb the flight characteristics, although it was noisy as heck. They didn't test the flotation of the ramp, since it was designed to deploy while the plane was on the water. They thought the hydraulics that deployed the ramp were a neat feature, with a sensor that detected feedback pressure and stopped the deployment when it met resistance. Chief Nichols pointed out the Liquid Oxygen tanks that Northrop/Grumman had installed in this model, so it could be used for SAR or Medevac, and told Ron that they were shipped empty, but could be easily filled. Grumman had installed 2 conformal 20 pound LO₂ tanks in the fuselage with standard LO₂ connections. All he had to purchase was the flex connector, and a regulator/gassifier that would convert the LO₂ to oxygen gas, and reduce the pressure to 32lbs/in², and regulate the flow from 1-6 liters per minute. Each tank could feed 2 patients at 6 liters/min for over 12 hours. He explained that the Medevac planes used to use Oxygen gas until the technology evolved to the point that it was safe to store liquid oxygen aboard an aircraft, and they built liquid tanks that could be made to fit inside the fuselage, saving critical cabin space. The liquid was actually safer to store than the gas, since it had to depressurize, warm up, and not dissipate to be a fire hazard. Since they banned smoking on all flights, the risks to aircraft were reduced to fire or crash damage, and if they had a fire or crash bad enough to jeopardize the LO₂ tanks, they had a bigger problem than the tank to deal with. There was a freeze danger, but that only affected the people who filled the tanks, and they were trained to avoid getting frostbite from the supercold liquid.

Ron did a walk-around, and the plane looked like it had just rolled off the factory floor. Chief Nichols had the plane washed and waxed and painted before Ron took delivery of it. When he got around to the other side, he noticed the Allakaket Airlines logo above the stripe, and the commemorative tail number the FAA gave to the first production unit of the new aircraft line:

SG-00001. Ron shook Chief Nichols hand, thanked him, and they climbed aboard the plane. Chief Nichols belted himself into the right seat, and told Ron that they had to take a quick check ride before he could release the plane. Ron used the APU to start the turbines, and then completed the pre-flight checklist. Once the engine instruments were in the green, and the rest of the pre-flight checks done, he called the tower and requested permission to take off and circle the field. “Allakaket Airlines SG-00001 calling Wing-19 tower, request permission to take-off and circle field for familiarization flight.”

“Roger Allakaket, pattern is clear, you’re free to circle the field. Call when ready to land.”

“Roger, Allakaket Rolling.”

Ron had reached the end of the taxiway, and was waiting for clearance when the last transmission was made, so he pushed both throttles to their take-off positions. He already had the flaps and trim tabs set, so when the plane accelerated to 80 knots, he pulled back gently on the yoke, and cruised around the field about 10 miles out. Ron checked the controls and the equipment, and everything was satisfactory. He noticed that the pilot’s seats were nicer than the ones in his TurboGoose, and a lot more comfortable. He guessed that for a half-mil per copy, they should include some creature comforts. He’d have to check and see how much these seats cost, and get them installed in the rest of his fleet. “Chief, can you find out about these seats, they’re so much more comfortable than the ones in our planes. I’d like to know how much it would cost to retrofit our aircraft to these seats.”

“Ron, I’ve got all the paperwork for the plane in a box behind you. It should include all the info on anything installed in the aircraft, including the seats. You’d be better off ordering from the manufacturer and installing them yourselves.”

“Thanks Chief. I’m satisfied with the aircraft; can I take you home so I can fly this bird home?”

Chief Nichols nodded, so Ron called the tower “Wing-19 Tower, Allakaket requesting permission to land.”

“Roger Allakaket, runway is clear. Come on in.”

Ron turned toward the runway while he extended the flaps, and made a nice soft landing. Chief Nichols told him to taxi up to the fuel pumps, he’d top off the tanks and the Canadian Government would pick up the tab. When they got to the fuel depot an airman was waiting to fill all the tanks with JP-5 including the APU. He shut down the turbines for safety, and 5 minutes later he was full. Chief Nichols signed the receipt, then they shook hands again, and he walked out of the cockpit, secured the door, and waved when he was clear. Ron started the turbines, and taxied to the runway while calling for take-off clearance. The tower cleared him, and told him to climb to 10,000 feet for the flight back to Allakaket. Ron decided to get the LO2 tanks filled later once he had his paramedic gear aboard. He remembered that he also

needed to get another SU-16 and an emergency kit as well. On the long flight home, he used his sat phone to call BA and get things arranged. Allakaket Airlines had a FFL, so getting the SU-16 and the mags was easy, and they stocked several of them. He had BA check about getting the liquid oxygen tanks filled. He said he'd have an answer for him when he landed. Once he was landed, he taxied to the pumps, filled the tanks full of JP-5, and taxied to the hangar, where someone would park the plane for him. He got out and got into his truck and drove to the offices of Allakaket Airlines.

"I did some checking, and for as little O2 as you'd use, Alaska Regional Hospital would be willing to fill your tanks for free, and they said they'd like a look at your SuperGoose, since they ordered a couple. Steve asked if tomorrow would be OK. He said that they have a mountable case for your Paramedic kit as well that they could mount for you while you're there, and they have Paramedic kits in stock too."

"Ok BA, but I need a couple of thousand dollar gassifier/regulator units for the tanks to work in the first place."

BA got back on the phone to Steve, who told him the hospital had figured that out too, and got them from the State department of Emergency Services for free, so they could give him 2 units including the flex hose and the oxygen delivery equipment. When Ron heard that, he was glad the state was rolling in Oil Revenue, and could afford to do that. He told BA to tell Steve he'd be there at 10:00 tomorrow morning. He wanted to sleep in. He drove home, and was mobbed by a bunch of kids and a big dog. Nancy waited until he got out from underneath the dog pile to give him a hug and a kiss. Since it was late in the afternoon, Ron got out of doing any more of his "honey-dos" that day and spent the time with his family until Nancy got up to make dinner. He told her he would have to fly to Anchorage tomorrow morning at 0800 to get some stuff taken care of for the new plane. Ron was telling her all about it, and she said she couldn't wait to try flying it. Ron asked her if she wanted to fly to Anchorage with him, they'd be gone most of the day between flying back and forth, and getting the stuff installed in the aircraft. She told Ron to call Anne and ask if she wanted to babysit.

"Mom, it's Ron, can you babysit tomorrow? We need to fly the new SuperGoose to Anchorage to get the Paramedic kit installed, and get the liquid oxygen tanks filled. You will, great, see you around 7:30; I love you too - bye."

He gave Nancy the good news, and then they fed the tribe. After feeding time, they ate dinner themselves while Moose chaperoned the 3 Amigos. David zonked out after dinner, so Nancy put him back in his crib before they ate dinner. After dinner, Ron started a tickle fight, and Nancy's reaction told him the kids were going to go to bed early tonight.

The next morning, Anne was there right at 0730, so they traded spots as Ron and Nancy went out the door as Anne came in. They drove to the airport, and someone already had the SuperGoose out of the hangar, and the turbines idling. Ron made a note to himself to find out

who was prepping the planes for him, and give him a bonus or a raise. Even after owning the airline all these years, he wasn't used to all the perks, and felt like he should reward people for going out of their way to make things easier for him. They climbed aboard, and were taxiing out on lake when Ron asked Nancy if she wanted to take off. She shrugged and started lifting off her shirt.

"No the plane silly!"

"I know, just thought I'd get back at you for the last time you said that, and you meant it the other way."

She pulled her shirt back down and set the plane up for take-off. Ron called for permission, and they reached the end of the lake right when they got approval to take-off. Nancy heard the call, and turned to Ron and said "Co-pilot's plane" then Ron took his hands off the yoke, and his feet off the pedals. Nancy took the controls, and then reached over to push the twin throttles to full, and as soon as the airspeed indicator said 80 knots, she pulled back on the yoke, and when she was at 500 feet AGL, she eased up on the rate of climb, and turned toward Anchorage. A little over an hour later, they were landing at the hospital's airstrip. Ron and Nancy got out, and were met by Steve and Roger. They told Ron they needed to taxi the plane over to the Maintenance hangars, and they'd meet them over there. Ron and Nancy climbed back aboard, started the turbines, and taxied over to the maintenance hangar. Steve and Roger drove a pickup in front of them with a bed full of stuff that was going into the plane. They parked in front of the maintenance hangar, and Ron stopped in a marked stall, and left the turbines idling. Once the propellers stopped spinning, he opened the cabin doors and rear ramp so Steve and Roger could get a good look at the interior as well. They were pleasantly surprised. Grumman had lengthened the cabin by 6 feet, and installed a rear ramp door, just about doubling the useful cabin space. Now instead of 4 stretcher cases, it could carry 6 without resorting to a stacking arrangement, and still have room for a couple of seats.

The 3 of them started unloading the cases and kits that needed to be installed, and a mechanic came forward with an air powered drill to mount the brackets to the airframe on the cabin side of the bulkhead. He mounted steel locking cases for the Paramedic kit, the O2 delivery system, and a first aid kit for minor injuries. Once the brackets were affixed, they locked the kits to the brackets and handed Ron the keys. The Mechanic asked Ron to completely shut the aircraft off, leave all doors open, and turn off the battery switch, and he would fill the liquid oxygen tanks. Roger explained that whenever Allakaket Airlines operated as a Medevac, they were to fill their liquid oxygen supply from their tank, since the State of Alaska was responsible for keeping the tank full. Roger handed Steve a stack of forms that they were to use to bill the State for the use of Allakaket Airlines planes for SAR or Medevac services. He said that the State had authorized a reimbursement of \$1,000 per hour of flight time, plus \$500 per hour for ground time if the pilot was involved in a Medevac or SAR mission. Ron thought that was really generous of the State, and didn't say anything. The mechanic reeled out a big thick hose with a male plug that matched the female connector for the oxygen system attached to a big heavy duty

valve. Roger explained that the O₂ delivery system was fairly complicated and redundant to prevent accidents. Once the mechanic had the connection made, he took a tool out of his pocket, and opened the vent valve next to the female connector, and connected a diverter hose so the liquid couldn't splash directly on him. The diverter was attached to a vented heavy glass jar that would show whether or not liquid oxygen was coming out of the vent. Finally he opened the delivery valve, and 5 minutes later, 1 tank was full, so he repeated the process on the other side of the aircraft. With both tanks full, he put the removable covers back on the oxygen ports and took the hose back to the huge oxygen tank with him, then shut off the main valve, and opened the delivery valve to depressurize the hose.

With the system fully pressurized, Steve showed Ron how to work the oxygen delivery system. It was as simple as plugging into the oxygen port, and setting the liter per minute flow. He explained that the connectors were special connectors that shut off the flow if there was a break in the line, or other malfunction. The delivery system offered a choice of cannula or mask to deliver oxygen. The only thing it couldn't do was act as an automatic respirator. That was a much more expensive system, so they had a manual system that the flight nurse had to push a button every time to deliver a metered dose of pure O₂. Ron thought it looked awfully like the old manual respirators, and Steve said that was exactly what it was, and they had been retrofitted to work with the new liquid system. Steve put the unit back in its case and locked it. Ron thanked both of them, and said they had to get back to Allakaket, so Steve and Roger reluctantly got out of the aircraft, and said their goodbyes. Ron and Nancy got back aboard, and Ron reset everything, then closed the ramp door and started the turbines. He received immediate take-off clearance, and they flew back to Allakaket. When he got there, the mechanic had the pelican case with his SU-16 and the other with his emergency gear, and started installing them against the bulkhead on the cockpit side. Ron was glad that his emergency gear was aboard now, since he really felt vulnerable without it.

Chapter 33 - Summer at the Cottage

Several years later, Ron and Nancy decided to spend the summer at the lodge since the kids Jake(10), Josh (9), Sarah(8), and David(7) were old enough to enjoy it. Nancy kept them either within sight of the lodge, or under positive control with a 4-way leash system. Ron didn't say anything, but felt like Nancy was a musher trying to control an unruly sled dog team. Funny thing was Nancy felt the same way, but didn't think Ron would find the image too amusing either. They both carried a shoulder holster with a 22/45 and a .44 Magnum Colt Anaconda. Anne gave Nancy her handguns and shoulder holster years ago, although she still carried her P-14 wherever she went in Allakaket. Doc Miller asked her one day why she was armed, and she pointed out that Allakaket was in the middle of no where, with no real police force, and either 2-legged or 4-legged varmints could be a real problem. Anne took Doc Miller to the range one day during some down time, and within a couple of trips he was hooked. He remembered qualifying with his 1911 in the Army, because even docs in the Army, if they were Officers still have to qualify with a sidearm. He felt the P-14 was much easier to shoot, but the grip was a bit on the large side, but manageable. He agreed that the 14 rounds of .45acp on tap made it worth the extra width. Finally he broke down and bought one when they had a break-in attempt. He was pretty sure someone was after the drug cabinet and the narcotics kept there. Anne suggested an IWB holster so he could be armed without anyone knowing it, so he didn't freak out patients.

So they wouldn't take a SuperGoose out of service for the summer, Ron had 007 fly the family up to the cabin, and later that day, a Goose flew up there with 6 months worth of supplies. Nancy had to get used to cooking on wood, since the propane delivery plane wouldn't attempt to land at HelpmeJack Lake. The Catalina the propane company flew was a nice big cargo plane, but didn't have the STOL capability of the SuperGoose or even the TurboGoose. Ron hired his handyman to help him cut wood, and within a week they had enough wood laid up for a year. The kids adjusted to the lack of TV, and Ron was actually glad they didn't have TV because he considered it a distraction. Ron bought a couple of .22 single shot youth rifles for the kids to learn how to shoot. Ron sat them down and explained the safety rules to them. They were all eager to shoot, since they had watched Mom and Dad shoot years before when they went to the cabin, but they were too young to join in. The chipmunk youth models were perfect for the kids, and Ron made sure they wore eye and ear protection all the time. Ron started them on empty tin cans, and soon they had the hang of it, and were hitting a small soup can regularly at 20 yards. The single-shot rifle made them slow down, concentrate, and make each shot count. Ron was surprised when Sarah turned out to be the best shot of all of them, then he realized that little boys had a real problem settling down and concentrating. Most of them had an attention span measured in minutes at best, and if they hadn't been so excited at the prospect of doing something Mommy and Daddy did, they would have quickly lost interest. Ron wanted to teach them to shoot pistols, but Nancy thought that might be too dangerous for them. Ron decided to wait a while for that; so every day, they spent about half an hour plinking at tin cans from the front porch. Sarah was now hitting tin cans at 100 yards, while her brothers were

managing 50 yards at the best. Ron told them that once they settled down and concentrated, they could shoot like their sister. Sarah stuck her tongue out at her brothers behind her dad's back. She might have been turning into Annie Oakley, but she was still a little girl underneath, and enjoyed tormenting her brothers.

During the last 5 years, General Shepard and Col. Steve Fellows both retired, and the Special Forces Joint Command made a present of 2 Robo-Tank Bradleys, now called the Shepard Anti-tank system. They delivered 1 to Allakaket, and another to their mine site to protect the valuable resource. Gold by now was up over \$\$600 per ounce and climbing, but since President Hatch had opened the North Shore Oil Reserve to exploration and drilling, the price of oil had stabilized at \$36.00 per barrel. The permanent basing of 2 Divisions of Marines in Saudi Arabia helped as well, since no one in their right mind wanted to mess with the USMC, especially after they announced their bullets were dipped in pig fat after a notorious Terrorist attack on the oil field manifold. Thousands of Raghead terrorists found out that these Marines weren't like the PC Marines under Clinton, they fought dirty! President Hatch was fed up with Islamic Terrorists, and reasoned correctly that the reason there was an abundance of suicide bombers is that dying as a martyr guaranteed a quick trip to paradise, and otherwise they had to live in their shithole countries and live a perfect life to get into paradise. By taking away their free pass to paradise, the number of attacks quickly dropped from the thousands per year to less than 10 per year. He told the Commandant of the Marines to do whatever was necessary to stop the terrorist attacks. So he took the President at his word, and the attacks stopped. Geraldo Rivera, now in his 60's and wearing a Che Guevara lapel pin, was broadcasting live from the front when he "accidentally" stepped on an anti-vehicle mine and was blown to smithereens. Of course it was an Islamic Terrorist's IED that he stepped on, and suddenly the Press shut up for once about "atrocities"!

General Shepard admitted for the first time in almost 30 years that his first name was Gene, since he felt funny with everyone calling him General after he retired. He noticed Anne one day when he was in the clinic for a physical, and was smitten. Later he remembered who she was, and asked Steve what he thought. He said his sister had been a widow long enough, and if he wanted to date his sister, he'd have to ask her! When Ron found out his mom was dating the General, he remembered what his Dad had told him at the cabin the day he died, to encourage his mom to date and remarry if she wanted to, since she was still relatively young. When Anne asked him, he gave his mom a big hug and told her what Roy told him that afternoon, virtually word for word. That clinched it for her, and she started dating the General, who was in no hurry to get married. They went shooting together, and he wanted to take her to the pool, but it took a while for her to want to be seen in mixed company in a bathing suit. For a woman in her late 50's early 60's, she had kept her figure, but was still self-conscious about being seen in a bathing suit. When she finally got a look at the General, she didn't feel so bad. Years of sitting at a desk had converted his washboard abs to a sizable jelly roll! He was still in good shape, and jogged each morning with Steve to stay in shape, and was a pretty good shot for an old guy!

Ron remembered how much work it was to live in that log cabin, but thanked God that they had

year-round running hot and cold water and flush toilets, or their summer in the lodge would have been a real short trip! Nancy asked Ron if he wanted to go hunting, and they talked about what to do with the kids. They didn't really need the meat, but Ron felt that caribou meat was better for you than the stuff they bought in the store. Nancy said she'd can it if he'd shoot it, but they couldn't figure out if they should bring the kids with them. Finally they decided to call Mom. Ron gave Anne a call, and asked her "Mom, what should we do?"

"I think it might be an idea to wait a couple of years to take the kids hunting. If I remember correctly, we waited until Ron was almost 12 before he went on his first hunt. With the 4 kids, especially since David's so young, you might want to wait a few years. I trust Ron is teaching them to shoot already?"

"Yeah, and Sarah is the best shooter of the bunch! She's hitting tin cans at 100 yards with her chipmunk!"

"Her older brothers must just love that!"

"It's giving them incentive to try harder, so I'm not discouraging the competition as long as it stays relatively civil."

"You mean until it degenerates into fist fights?"

"I won't let it get that far, Sarah might be catching up on her brothers, but even Josh outweighs her by 10-15 pounds, and Jake is almost twice her size. Besides, I think they're still protective of their "little sister" at least for now. Thanks for the advice Mom, Tell Gene I said hi!"

Anne laughed and hung up, and wondered how he knew Gene was visiting her. They were just on their way to the range, then they were going to the pool to swim laps. Even Bear found time to go swimming, especially now that he had two boys to raise, he wanted to live long enough to see them grown, and hopefully one of them would follow in his Dad's footsteps. He had a slightly longer trip to the pool, and took advantage of the 007, since there were two of them.

Meanwhile, back in Atlanta, Ralph and Sam had settled down to married life as doctors. During the 5 years at Grover, she had completed her Residency, and passed her board exams, and became a Board Certified General Surgeon with a specialty in Emergency Surgery. Ralph was glad she had completed her residency and was now Board Certified because they had to wait until she passed her boards before they could even think of starting a family, and Sam was on Birth Control since they didn't want to risk Sam's medical career by a pregnancy during her residency. You can't be pregnant and a surgeon, due to health risks to the baby from the anesthesia. Once she was board certified, she could take time off to have a baby, and come right back, because the hospital was a Major Trauma Center, and was practically begging for ER docs and surgeons, and immediately put Dr. Samantha Lacombe on staff, which was a huge raise in pay from her days as a Resident. She had privileges at the other hospitals in the area as

well, in case they had an emergency and she was the only surgeon available. Sam thought that was a very remote possibility, but the hospitals did it as a matter of course for Emergency Surgeons, and other specialties that were in high demand. Ralph was promoted to Chief Resident when the chief moved to another hospital, so his career was on track as well. They were still renting, and debated buying a house in Atlanta, or moving elsewhere, since Sam could work anywhere in the country.

Both of them were happy in Atlanta, they had a 2 bedroom apartment in a nice area of Atlanta, and plenty of friends at the Hospital and the local Baptist church they attended when they could. They wound up buying a large Chevy Suburban SUV with a 4x4 setup, 30-inch off-road tires, and lousy gas mileage. The front and rear bumpers were beefed up and carried a 10K winch. Sam thought it was a little overkill, but Ralph told her that less than 100 miles from Atlanta were some areas they would need a vehicle like this, besides in an emergency, the huge pipe bumpers and nerf bars would help them push smaller vehicles out of their way if they had to get to the hospital or get out of Atlanta in a hurry. Ralph always kept the tanks at least half full, and rotated the two spare 5-gallon fuel cans through the fuel tank every couple of months. He had a paramedic kit, an entire frontier tool kit, and a BOB /72-hr kit in the vehicle. They had a hidden compartment built and covered with the same carpet that covered the back of the vehicle. It was so well done that most people didn't know what he had back there. Ron had called Bear when he got back from vacation, and gave him the number of a retired SEAL that ran a shooting/self-defense school just outside Atlanta. Ron called Ralph and told him about the school, and after meeting the owner/Instructor, they signed up for his self-defense and shooting course. It was a year-long course for 2 hours once a week. It wasn't cheap, but by the end of the year, they had the equivalent of a black-belt in several different martial arts, and as much training in weapons as he could legally teach a civilian. Ralph was Sam's sparring partner, and he was almost scared of her when they sparred with rubber knives, being a surgeon meant she knew where to cut you so you bled the fastest.

George, the owner/instructor, liked teaching doctors, because they could be either the biggest sheep, or the most viscous knife fighters since they knew all the good targets. Sometimes, Ralph would check himself for chalk marks after a sparring session, and found faint lines right where veins and arteries were the closest to the skin, and easy to hit. Ralph really liked shooting much better, and took to pistol shooting like a duck to water. They were about equal when shooting at paper targets handing in the air, but Ralph was much faster at the pop-up range. George rented time at a large range that had the budget to build a pop-up and mover range almost as good as the one at MacDill, so Ralph became a really good reactive shooter. With scoped rifles, they could both hit the kill zone of a B-27 out to 300 yards, so George said that was good enough since neither of them felt they needed to shoot much past 300 yards. Over time their weapons collection improved, then one day a letter showed up that had a return address of JSOC, MacDill AFB, Florida. Ralph was scratching his head until he opened the envelope and read a letter

Ralph and Sam:

Ron told me about you, and I've issued you both a Federal CCW. You're doctors in a city that could get nasty if TSHTF, so I felt it was worth issuing the permits based on Ron's letter attesting to your character and the level of training you have in Self-defense and firearms. I know how hard it is to get a CCW through your state, so I bypassed the entire bunch of red tape and issued you Federal CCW's that allow you to carry concealed anywhere in the US. Please don't abuse the privilege because I'm sticking my neck out for you two.

Sincerely,

General Shepard
JSOC

Inside were 2 Federal CCWs. 1 in the name of Dr. Raphael Lacombe, and the other in the name of Dr. Samantha Lacombe. There was no expiration date on the permit.

"Sam, check this out - Ron got us 2 Federal CCW's."

"How'd he do that?"

"It says here General Shepard, JSOC. I'll look it up in the internet."

2 minutes later, Ralph entered General Shepard in Google, and it came back that he was the Commanding General of the Joint Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida. He was a 3-star General. Ralph realized that the General had a lot of pull, which explained an awful lot of the E-mail he had received recently from Ron and Nancy. Evidently Allakaket was now an armed camp, and everyone went around armed, and there was enough military hardware there to fight off a large well-equipped attack.

Ralph stuck his CCW in his wallet, and Sam put hers in her purse. They then went to the local gun store and bought 2 Para-Ord P-14's and 8 magazines on Ron's recommendation. They bought 2 IWB holsters, 2 double-mag carriers, and Sam bought a neat purse that she could carry her gun in when she wasn't wearing pants - like at church. She was leery about going armed in church until Ralph reminded her that if Ron hadn't been armed at church, they'd all be dead. Sam picked up her purse and the P-14, loaded the mag, stuck it in the gun, cycled the action, then topped off the mag, and stuck it in her holster inside the purse, and added a spare mag inside the gun compartment.

"Well I guess that answers my next question" Ralph laughed, and stuck his cocked and locked P-14 inside his IWB holster, and put 2 mags in his double-mag carrier, then stuck them inside his pants, and clipped the clips to his belt. Now they were ready for bear!

Ralph sent Ron an e-mail thanking him for the Federal CCW's, and Ron replied "You're

welcome! Wear them in good health!” Ralph hoped they would never need them. When they finished their year-long course, George gave them a very special gift. He had purchased several Emerson CQC-6 knives from Ernie Emerson years ago and stored them. He gave them to select customers as a graduation gift. The fee he charged for his training was great enough that giving the valuable knives away didn’t affect his bottom line. When they got home, Ralph ran Ernie Emerson and the CQC-6 knife in particular through Google, and found out they were collector’s items, and very valuable. Most owners were Special Forces people that Ernie made knives for before he became famous. Ralph told Sam that they should send George a note of thanks now that they knew the value of the gift. Ralph sent the e-mail that afternoon, and George replied that their best thank-you would be in the form of referrals since he didn’t advertise. Ralph and Sam sent several trusted Doctor friends to George’s school. Some just got refresher training, others signed up for his 6 month program. They all liked George’s training, and started practicing together after they completed his course. They knew each other socially, and eventually started an informal survival group, and started buying equipment as a group to get lower prices. They all got Bushmaster HBAR AR-15’s and matching web gear. They were well equipped medically since they all were doctors. Ralph e-mailed Ron asking for gear suggestions, and he forwarded it to Bear since he was the resident expert. His suggestions looked like a listing of the Brigade Quartermaster catalog. Since money wasn’t an issue, they accumulated 10 sets of very high-speed low-drag gear. Their main drawback was a total lack of military experience. They hoped to solve that problem soon, and see if they could bring in some members with military experience. Ralph decided to tell George what they were up to, and he met with them and eventually told them what he had been up to since his retirement. He had a very low profile militia set up in Atlanta that included only customers of his with the necessary security credentials to take his course. Ralph said “I don’t have a security clearance!”

“I know, one was never issued, but I run the equivalent of a DOD Secret background check on all my clients, and if you don’t pass, I don’t teach you! Most of my clients are ex-military or military dependents. Your group of friends was the first non-military people I’ve taught. If you’re interested, we meet next Wednesday at the Dojo.”

Chapter 34 - Hunting

Ron decided the best thing to do was go hunting by himself for now, so the next morning, he packed his bag, and his Browning A-bolt, loaded them on the trailer, attached them to the trailer hitch of his ATV, kissed Nancy and the kids, and said he'd be back before dark. He was at the Caribou grounds a little over an hour later, hiked over the hill, and the meadow was full of Caribou. He wondered why they were there so early, but decided to save the deep thoughts for later, and set up to shoot two large male caribou. He stuck his ear plugs in his ears, and loaded the rifle, then selected the two bulls he wanted, and shot them right through the neck/shoulder junction, and they dropped in a heap where they stood. He emptied the magazine and picked up everything then hiked back over the hill to where his ATV was parked and drove it right up to the cooling bodies of the caribou he had shot. As soon as he cleared the treeline of the meadow, the entire herd spooked. He slit the throats of the bulls to bleed them out, and then started the skinning and butchering process. Once the skins were off, he set them aside to brain tan later. He made short work of both bulls, and had the prime cuts of meat out within hours. He left the rest for scavengers, and then proceeded to brain tan both hides. He finished with 2 hours of daylight to spare, so he hurried back to the lodge, and made it just before dark. He backed the trailer into the old smokehouse, removed the backpack and rifle from the trailer, and parked the ATV in the shed. He remembered to lock the smokehouse door, and then went inside. Nancy told him to hurry up and take a shower, so Ron took off his clothes and got cleaned up. When he walked down to the kitchen/dining room, dinner was ready. Nancy said "I put the kids down early, so we have the evening to ourselves." Ron decided to hurry up and eat dinner. When he finished, he leaned over and kissed Nancy, then put his plates in the sink, walked over, and picked her up and carried her to the bedroom.

The next day, Ron helped her with breakfast, then shooed the kids out of the kitchen so they could can the caribou meat in peace. Moose was getting older and slower, but still loved to play with the kids, and was an excellent baby sitter. Ron went outside and carried sections of caribou meat into the house and set them on the table. Nancy set a fire in the woodstove and got out the canning equipment. She got a large pot of water boiling to sterilize the lids while she washed and dried the jars. Ron was busy sectioning the meat into pieces that would fit in the jars. As soon as she was ready, he started filling jars, and she put them into the canner, then lifted the lids one at a time out of the boiling water with the tongs and carefully placed them on the glass jars, and screwed the lids down finger tight. Once the canner was full, she closed the lid, closed the relief valve, and moved it to a hot part of the stove. Once it was up to operating temperature and pressure, she started a timer, and carefully watched the pressure. If it got too high, she moved the canner to a cooler part of the stove, too cool and she moved it back. Finally the first batch was done, and after she let the canner cool, she tripped the pressure relief valve, and heard a bunch of pings as the lids sealed down as they cooled. She carefully lifted them out of the canner with the provided jar lifter, and set them on a towel on the counter to finish cooling to room temperature. They did almost 100 quart jars that day in shifts, and by the end of the day, they were both too tired to make a fancy dinner, so the kids got their favorite

meal, Spaghetti-O's and chopped up hot dogs. Even Ron liked it, and Nancy liked it because it was quick and easy. Moose got dry dog food, and was happy. After they put the kids to bed, they collapsed from exhaustion and fell right to sleep.

Next Wednesday Evening came sooner for Sam and Ralph than they thought. They had met with their friends at work, and decided that Sam and Ralph should meet the members of George's group before they met the rest of them. Sam thought they were a bunch of chickens, but kept her peace. They were worried that they might be a bunch of ex-Military Rambo types, and they wanted none of that, they just wanted to survive the occasional natural disaster, hurricane, or flood that hit Atlanta. They didn't realize their own government could be more of a danger than Mother Nature. When they got there, they were greeted by George and 4 other men, who George introduced as the leaders of the other cells. He gave introduced them as Larry, Moe, Curly, and Shemp. Ralph started laughing, the Three Stooges was his favorite cartoon in college. Once Ralph had calmed down, George explained OPSEC, and guerrilla fighter cells. They would be the only people to ever meet face to face with the leaders of the other cells, and they would never know their real names, only their code names. George said that they were the de-facto leaders of their cell, since the others weren't willing to come forward.

Ron said "Wait a minute, we never agreed to anything, we just wanted to find out what is going on here."

"Ok, there are several cells all over the state, and I'm not saying how many and where they are, that are informally linked into a loose network. Their prime objective is survival in the event of a natural disaster, invasion, or to defend our homes in the event that the government turns on us and the Constitution. We aren't set up or designed for offensive operations, but we will defend our homes and our rights."

"Wait a minute, I thought that had already happened?"

"We haven't crossed the Rubicon yet, since the government hasn't sent in the Jack Booted Thugs to confiscate food and weapons. When that happens, we'll act. Until then, we train secretly, and you'll never meet these gentlemen again unless it's either a SHTF or TEOTWAWKI scenario."

"Excuse me, but what does TSHTF and TEOTWAWKI mean?"

George laughed and explained "TSHTF stands for The Shit Hits The Fan, kind of a major disaster, but less than TEOTWAWKI, which stands for The End Of The World As We Know It. Basically emergencies fall on a continuum of how severe they are, and how many people they affect. A 10Km diameter meteor hitting the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean would be a TEOTWAWKI scenario, or Yellowstone blowing up. TSHTF might be a Mt. St. Helen's eruption that affects a local area in a major way, but the rest of the country is minimally

effected. Mild earthquakes wouldn't even reach a TSHTF designation, but a 7-8 Richter Earthquake could either be a TSHTF or a TEOTWAWKI depending on where it hit."

"Ok, I've got it now, so this whole organization is just for dire emergencies that affect more than the local area. So why did you bring us in?"

"Frankly we've been waiting for Medical people all along. We've got medics and RN's but you and Sam are exactly what we would need, an ER doc and an Emergency Surgeon. All that Sam would have needed to be a prefect candidate would have been MASH experience in an actual shooting war."

"This is going to work out great, because our whole group is composed of Doctors, Nurses and Paramedics, and we desperately needed someone to teach us Military tactics so we can move and evade if needed without getting caught. Is there someone in your group that can teach us?"

"Yeah Me! I don't want to expose anyone from another group for security reasons, and I can teach you all you need to know. If you join our Militia, the training is free, otherwise this meeting never happened, and you'll never see any of us again."

"If it were up to us, we'd join in a heartbeat, but we need to put it to a vote. Can I call you in a couple of days?"

George realized that Ralph and Sam couldn't speak for the rest of the group yet, so he told them to call him at his number in 48 hours. If he didn't get a call, they wouldn't see him again. With that, everyone left, and Ralph and Sam walked back to their SUV. Once they were safely inside, Sam said "Isn't he being a little paranoid?"

"Not really Sam, we're the only people he's trained that aren't either ex-military or military dependents. He's taking a big risk by even telling us about them. They must really need doctors."

"Ok, so what do we tell everyone else?"

"I'll give them the Reader's Digest version, and tell them we have to make our minds up quick."

When they got home, they called everyone, and set up a meeting at their house. Since they normally got together on Friday anyway, it was nothing unusual. Several docs were still leery, finally Sam spoke up.

"For Pete's sake, it's not like they're trying to blow up the UN or anything. This is just a contingency setup in case things got really bad." She looked straight at the Doctor that was raising the biggest objections "Remember that Cuban kid they took out of his home at

gunpoint? That could be any of us, and if the Government was to declare Martial Law and turn FEMA and the ATF loose, would you like the odds that they would actually behave themselves given their past behavior? Take it one step further, let's say that we get a Liberal President and Congress, and they pass something worse than the Patriot Act that calls for the confiscation of all firearms. We bought our AR-15's from a licensed dealer, which means the ATF knows we bought them. What if you got your door kicked in at 3:00am and a bunch of goons with MP-5s pointed in your face demand you surrender your guns. OK, let's take than 1 step further, say you refuse - maybe you sold it and they don't believe you. Do you think that they'd give a rip about your Civil Rights or even your personal safety at that point."

Ralph took over at that point "I'll be dammed if I let some JBT bust in my door to grab my guns, and possibly shoot me and rape my wife while I watch. This sort of tyranny is exactly what George was talking about. Only by organizing can we have a chance to stop that kind of behavior in its tracks."

Ralph's little speech convinced the fence-sitters, who were more Pacificist than the rest of the team. He called for a vote, and it was unanimous. Ron called the Dojo, and said two words. "We're in" and hung up. He knew George would get the message, and its meaning. The meeting broke up shortly thereafter. He told them he'd let them know when George would schedule the rest of their training.

Ron, Nancy and the kids were enjoying their summer vacation, and as the summer turned to fall, Jake and Josh finally caught up with their little sister, and were hitting tin cans at 100 yards with their chipmunk .22 rifles. Ron decided he was going to teach Josh and Jake how to shoot a pistol, since Jake was almost 11, and Josh wanted to do whatever his big brother did. Ron took them out front and set up a row of tin cans, and explained how the .22 pistol worked, then showed them that it made almost no noise, and was as easy to shoot as their rifles. With the red dot sight, it was probably easier, since he told them all you do is put the red dot on the target and squeeze the trigger. Jake got the hang of it after 1 mag, and Josh only needed 1 more mag before he was nailing tin cans at 30 feet. Slowly Ron ran the distance out over the weeks until they could do it at 25 yards, then he reduced the target size. Right before the end of the summer, he showed them how to play 22 golf. Sarah used her Chipmunk, and Josh and Jake used their parent's 22/45's. He let Sarah throw the balls out because she couldn't throw them more than 25 yards, and her mechanics meant that they were scattered all over the place. Ron hoped she would learn how to throw soon, and Nancy hoped she would eventually like to play with dolls. When it got cold, Ron called BA, and requested the SuperGoose come and pick them up, since they had too much stuff to fit in the 007 now. When they got home, Ron signed the 3 of them up for the Junior Shooter's league, where they would compete with kids their own age shooting .22 pistols and rifles at the indoor shooting range. Jake didn't think it was as much fun as shooting golf balls, but it made him learn to shoot small groups. Sarah won her age group for the next couple of years, and Josh and Jake were neck and neck for #1 and #2 in their age group, until Jake moved up to the next age group, then Josh was #1 until he joined his older brother. Sarah made some friends at the shooting range, including a boy that thought she

wasn't too revolting for a girl. As David got older, Ron got him started on the chipmunk .22. Since he was much younger than his older brothers, he wasn't as competitive, but stuck with it, and by the time he reached his 8th birthday, he was routinely nailing tin cans out to 50 yards.

Bear scheduled his swimming trips to coincide with the Senior League shooting days, and his greatest competition was Gene Shepard. Bear was glad he wasn't a General anymore, because now he could show him how the Navy taught you how to shoot without having his CO mad at him for beating him by 20 points in a 500 point match. Steve competed in the Senior Division too, and was really grateful that Ron shot in the open division, because they didn't have a chance against him. Ron had shot a possible, or 500 points in a 500 point match more than once. Nancy was no slouch either, and often won the women's open pistol competition, closely followed by her mother in law, and BA's wife Sally. Anne ruled the women's open smallbore rifle competition, with Nancy and Sally a distant second and third. Ron occasionally shot smallbore rifle, but preferred shooting his .308 or his BMG.50. Shooting an open-sighted .22 rifle at 100 yards wasn't his idea of fun, but he did it during the winter to keep sharp. One day he brought his SU-16 to a match just to see how accurate it was. He was glad it broke in half, otherwise he would have broken it in half at the end of the match, since his Ruger 10/22 shot groups half the size of the Keltec SU-16 at 100 yards. He realized that the SU-16 was a better pilot gun, since the .223 round had several times the energy of the .22lr that the 10/22 shot. Anything smaller than a bear was dead with the first round out of his SU-16 out to 100 yards, and in close, if he put enough rounds into a bear, it might work. He was glad he bought several 20 round magazines for the rifle, because if he needed to shoot a bear, he might need all of them to kill it unless he got lucky and blew the bear's heart apart with the first round, because the .223 round wouldn't penetrate the bear's thick skull unless it went through an eye.

Later that week, George called Ralph and Sam, and said that they needed to meet at his dojo. They called the rest of the group, and at 7:00 that night, they were in his dojo, when George walked in.

"I understand you guys want to learn how to move and think like a soldier. I can teach you how to move, but thinking that way takes a mental attitude that I don't think most of you have. None of you have seen combat, except maybe Ralph and Sam, but they were bystanders to a shootout, so let me tell you what is going to happen. The first thing is you might panic, and if you do, you're as good as dead. Fear is normal, panic is deadly. The difference is training. I've already taught you self-defense, but that is over quickly in your minds, and you think the police will be there to pick up the pieces. I've got a news flash for you - it doesn't take much to destroy the thin veneer of civilization, and then it's the law of the jungle. It doesn't matter if it lasts an hour, day, week, or year if you die during the disruption, you don't get to come back later when things are normal. From your self-defense classes, we talked about the Cooper Conditions, now we need to train you how to recognize when things are about to go from Normal to Abnormal, and what to do in the small space of time you have to either defend yourself or flee. We aren't talking about a mugging here, but a riot or a near-riot situation, or even the panic that results from a natural disaster, or an attack. Nothing "just happens" except

maybe a sudden nuclear attack or an earthquake. Everything else has precursors that you can recognize and avoid. Since you're all doctors, you could be stuck at work, or drafted for the duration of the emergency. If not, none of your homes are defensible for maybe more than 30 seconds. Therefore, you either need to move to safer neighborhoods, or think about what you would do in an emergency Civil defense in the United States is a joke, so there are no shelters for the average American, so you need to find your own."

Gary, the black neurosurgeon in the back spoke up. "What the heck are you talking about?

"Gary, I know you think that things will always remain the way they are, but do you remember the Watts Riots?"

"I read something about them in a History Book."

"Ok, how about the Rodney King Riots - you have to be old enough to remember them."

"Ok, I vaguely remember them."

"Ok, instead of working at Granger, let's say you worked at UCLA Medical Center the morning of the verdict. You would have been at ground zero of one of the worst riots in recent history. What would you have done, remember the LAPD has left and gone home."

That brought Gary to a full stop. While he was trained in Self-defense, he had failed to change his mental attitude, and George was trying to rectify that situation. Gary finally shook his head and sat down saying "I don't know what I would have done."

"Gary, admitting you don't know is the first step. That's what I'm here for, to help you game out the situation, play "what-if" games in your head. That way if it happens, you've already figured out what you would do, so you just do it without wasting precious time deciding what to do. You see, most military men aren't supermen; they've just been trained to think differently. Ralph and Sam are almost there, but they need some help too. For the next couple of months, I'm going to need you here every Wednesday at 7:00pm. You're going to be given homework assignments to do. Don't worry, I won't turn you into a bunch of paranoid survivalists, just bump you out of Condition White that most people go around all day, into at least condition Green or Orange. It's called Situational Awareness, and before you learn anything else, you need to learn SA. Once we've got that, I can teach you how to move silently as a group, and how to escape and evade. I know some of you are now carrying CCW's, and I'd like the rest of you to seriously consider getting one, and carrying at least a mini Altoids tin kit in your pocket."

"What's an Altoids tin kit?"

"Ralph you care to answer that?"

“I found them on the internet, on a Website called the Frugal Squirrels. Some guy named SSKM seems to be the resident expert on them. You buy a small tin of Altoids breath mints, and replace the candy with tiny pieces of equipment that are the bare minimum you would need to survive, like a tiny knife blade, a ferrochromium rod, tinder, a soda straw full of water purification tablets, a tiny LED light, fishing line and hooks, a couple of Ziploc bags, maybe a trash bag or something else. You seal them up watertight, and leave it in your pocket all the time, in case you loose your main emergency gear.”

“What’s the point of that?”

“Gary, with the knife you can make other tools, and the other stuff helps you make fire and purify water, 2 essentials for survival. The last is shelter, and you can use stuff in the kit to make shelter. But none of it will do you any good without the knowledge to use it, so knowledge of primitive survival techniques is essential.”

“I thought that was what our BOB’s were for?”

“What if you loose it, or have to drop it in a firefight, what are you going to do then?”

The total silence indicated to George that they hadn’t thought about that. He opened up a demo kit he made up to show people. It wasn’t waterproof, just closed with a piece of tape. He set the kit on a table and described the contents, and what you could do with them, including the tin itself. When he finished his little demonstration, he could see that a few more light bulbs had turned on.

“Ok, let’s say I dropped you off in the middle of Afghanistan and told you to make your way to England with only what you had in your pockets right now, how many of you think you could do that?”

Ralph thought about it for a minute, and said, “I think I can!”

George looked at the rest of them, and said that if certain things happened in the US, they could find themselves in a far worse situation, and they might have to survive with what they had on them or could scrounge, but they couldn’t get caught by the authorities, or the game’s over.

Chapter 35 - Newbies

The next Wednesday, the group raided the local Wal-mart and bought the tins and the following items:

Pack of single edge razor blades

Petroleum Jelly

Cotton balls

Trick Candles

BSA ferrochromium rod

P-38 can opener (doubles as striker for rod)

Micro LED light

Contractor Trash bag

Gallon Ziploc bags

Roll of 10/50 Spyderwire

1/8oz lead head jigs and plastic grubs

Roll of Snare wire (Steel leader wire non-braided)

Micro button compass

Safety pins

Box of finishing nails

100mph tape (Military Duct tape)

Under George's supervision, they put their kits together from the common supply in the center of the table. First, they made a large handful of PJ saturated cotton balls, so that everyone would have 3, then George used his Seal-a-meal to seal sets of 3 cotton balls in plastic after he sucked the air our, which reduced the size by 3 times. They each put 2 single-edge razors with their cardboard covers, 1 pack of PJ tinder, 2 trick candles, 1 BSA rod, 1 P-38, 1 LED light, 1 Contractor bag, 1 Gallon Ziploc bag, 50 feet of Spyderwire rolled around a small piece of cardboard, 2 jigs and grubs, 50 feet of snare wire, 3 finishing nails, 1 button compass, and 1 large and 2 small safety pins in their Altoids tins. It took them several tries until 1 of them discovered a way to make it all fit, then they all copied him. Finally, they wrapped the tin with the 100mph tape, which did 3 things: 1) it gave them a source of tape, 2) It made the kit waterproof, and 3) it prevented them from raiding the kit unless it was an emergency.

As they were assembling their kits, George explained the uses for each. Using a pie pan on the center of the table, he took a ball of PJ saturated cotton, pulled a dime-sized piece off the ball, then pulled it apart until it was the size of a quarter, then using a P-38 and the ferrochromium rod, threw a shower of sparks into the tinder from the rod. The tinder ignited immediately and burned for over a minute. George told them that PJ saturated cotton balls was one of the best tinders he knew, the other being a piece of Rubber Innertube. If they had a tube of Purell, it was gelled Alcohol, and was an excellent firestarter if necessary. He said the trick candles were to use to light multiple fires, or if they found matches, to light a fire with matches, since a single

match might not light a fire if the wood was damp, but a trick match will burn for 5 minutes, and dry out the wood. The Contractor bag was a poncho or shelter. The wire and nails were to make simple snares to catch rodents for dinner. Some of the women made "Gross" sounds until George told them if they got hungry enough, even a filthy rat would look pretty appetizing. The Spyderwire could either be used with the jigs and grubs for fishing, or else to build shelter. George knew that the Newbies, as he called the group, were just starting to figure things out, and he hoped more of them would wake up as the weeks went on, otherwise he would dump everyone except Ron and Sam and incorporate them into another group.

Ron, Nancy and the kids had an uneventful winter and spring, except for the kids' birthdays, which were fairly large parties full of noisy boisterous kids. Ron was about to break out the duct tape when his Mom walked up to him and suggested he go cut wood or something, because she could see that he wasn't dealing with the commotion very well. Ron hated to admit it, but his Mom was right. He got a lot of wood split that afternoon, but he wasn't proud to admit that he was thinking of something besides splitting wood as he drove the sledge hammer into the wedge, and the wood exploded with a satisfying sound. He came back in after the party was over feeling much better.

6 months later, BA got an emergency call from Don at the FAA office in Anchorage. "We've got a missing hunter and guide. It's Mike Nelson and his client, I'll give you two guesses as to who he uses as a pilot?"

BA swore under his breath, Fred Sanders was about the only bush pilot not working for Allakaket Airlines, for a good reason - he was an incorrigible drunk. He had been fired by several lodges for his drinking problem, and he refused to get help. BA had seen him more than once coming out of the Moose Café and getting into his plane. Ron and BA had a hard and fast rule. If you drank anything besides coffee, you couldn't fly for 24 hours. Fred violated that rule on a daily basis. No one ever caught him flying while intoxicated, because Dan would have pulled his license in a heartbeat if he could prove it. Dan told BA that if anything happened to Mike and his client, he was revoking Fred's license, and might even bring criminal charges if he could prove anything more than simple negligence. He asked Allakaket Airlines to contribute any available planes to an air/ground search for the lost guide and client, since they were now a week overdue. BA kept a log for the private guides who were supposed to file a hunting plan with him so if they turned up lost, they knew where to search. Since Fred was sitting in the Moose Café, he knew that he didn't crash anywhere, so either he forgot to pick them up, or else dropped them off in the wrong spot. BA assigned all available planes to a grid-search pattern. He was going to put a plane up on listening watch when he remembered Mike didn't believe in an emergency radio, and had no way to talk to a plane anyway. This was going to be a long visual search.

He called Ron and told him he was needed for a lost-hunter search. BA wanted him flying the SuperGoose with Anne as a flight nurse in case they needed him as a Medevac. Both 007s were available, so BA assigned them to the search as well. Every available bush pilot landed at

Allakaket and picked up a spotter. BA set up an inter-plane frequency for them to listen to, and cleared Allakaket Emergency frequency for the duration. He told the pilots to stay off Guard unless they had an in-flight emergency, and to stay off Allakaket Emergency unless they had a firm sighting of the guide or the hunter. The helicopters would fly to where they were supposed to be, and put in ground search teams, then fly low and slow over the area to expand the search area. Bear and Hunter each volunteered to lead a search team, and the students at their school also volunteered to help, realizing that this would be a good real-life exercise. They quickly packed their bags for a week on the ground, and took off in the 007 and headed toward the last known position of the guide and hunter. The Super Stallion and CH-47 were both available if they needed the rescue winch, but they were stood down on alert since they weren't very effective in searching, and very expensive to operate. The two S-76's would be more than enough, and the airspace around the search area would be crowded enough without the two huge helicopters. They started the search, and later that day the ground team located the hunter and guide. The hunter had fallen and broken his leg, and the guide had no means of calling anyone. Ron was livid, and felt badly for the hunter, who had endured the pain of a broken leg for a week because his cheapskate guide didn't have a radio, and his pilot was an irresponsible drunk. The S-76 landed and picked them up and flew them to Alaska General in Anchorage, so Ron was able to RTB instead of acting as a Medevac. When he got back to town, he called Dan and gave him an earful. Mike and the hunter were within a couple of miles of where they were supposed to be, and had been stranded over a week. That was all Dan needed to hear, and started proceedings to revoke Fred's Commercial ticket, meaning he could still fly, but not with paying passengers. Later that day Ron learned that the Hunter would lose his leg due to gangrene and infection. A couple of days longer, and he would have died from massive infection. He wondered if the State would take any action against the guide.

The first hurricane of the fall hit Florida on Monday. The news coverage of the disaster woke up the few members of Ralph and Sam's team that were still basically Sheeple. They showed up at the meeting Wednesday evening with a new-found enthusiasm for learning how to survive. George just hoped their interest wouldn't wane after their memories of the disaster faded. While they were interested, George took advantage of the situation, finished converting them from Sheeple. They now had the right mental attitude, all they needed was training. That would start next week. He told them next week to show up wearing dark clothes that they wouldn't mind getting dirty, they were going to learn how to be invisible.

Dateline Beijing China. Council of Ministers Building 0900 Local

Marshal Zang of the PLA presented Golden Dragon, the plan to attack and invade the US to a meeting of the Politburo.

"Comrades, we face starvation in a year if we take no action. The US has had bumper crops of wheat for the last 3 years, and we face progressively worse crop failures. Between lack of rain and the catastrophic collapse of the Three Gorges Dam, we have no water to irrigate 1/3 of our country, and are again importing electricity from other areas. Our very survival as a nation

depends on being able to feed the people. Even the Army has been cut back to short rations. Morale is at an all-time low between the lack of food, and fuel to train. We've been using the Army for the last couple of years as farmers instead of soldiers, and there is grumbling."

"Well, have MSS shoot the traitors and malcontents!" answered Premier Xu.

"Premier, that would mean executing 30% of our force, and some of my best officers. To do that would invite a mutiny. There must be a better way!"

Fang Yu, the Foreign Minister, objected "What you propose is naked aggression; surely we can ask the US for help. After all, if they have a bumper crop of wheat, wouldn't they rather sell it to us instead of face a nuclear war?"

"Who said anything about a nuclear war?"

"With all due respect Marshall, Golden Dragon calls for a first-strike use of nuclear warheads to destroy Washington DC, and the Naval bases in Hawaii and California, clearing the way for us to invade and occupy the United States. I tell you, this plan is madness."

Premier Xu could tell that he didn't have the votes to approve the attack, so he wisely tabled the vote. A white-faced Fang Yu strode purposefully out of the meeting. Shen Yu, the head of the MSS, caught up with him. "Fang, what is wrong?"

"This plan of the Marshall's will lead to the destruction of China, not our salvation. Even if we take out DC, the nuclear missile silos will execute their Doomsday commands and launch automatically if communication is lost with DC. We don't have enough missiles to take out DC, the west coast and the missile silos. Besides we can't take out the silos without destroying the very wheat fields we need to feed our people."

"How do you know this Minister Fang?"

"I can read as well as you, and have read your reports on US readiness. Ever since President Hatch was elected, their military readiness has dramatically improved. Under President Clinton, when the Central Committee designed the attack, it would have worked, because the US Military was weak and disorganized. Now it's doomed to failure, and us with it - what do you think would be the first target on the American's list - this building! You know they have nuclear bunker busters they built to get Saddam Hussein, but they would work just as well against us."

"True, but we still have millions of operatives in the US that could sabotage the very systems they would need to attack us."

"Shen, how will clerks, seamstresses and waiters succeed against what is now the best and

biggest military in the World. Even with SADMs, they could do minimal damage once they go on high alert. Our Navy is no match for their subs. I'm sure they have at least 1 boomer within cruise missile range right now, and at least 1 Fast Attack 688I sub in the South China Sea. As soon as the invasion fleet put to sea, they would be destroyed. We need to stop this madness right now!"

"Minister Fang, even with your opposition, the attack will go forward. Either you will suffer a fatal accident and be replaced, or they will foment a crisis that will force us to execute the plan. For your own safety, I ask you my friend not to be so vocal at the next meeting."

"Very well Minister Shen , since I don't have any choice in the matter, I can't resist if I'm dead."

"Exactly, and we'll need you for the peace negotiations afterward."

Minister Fang felt a sudden chill when Minister Shen bowed and left him. He knew he must stop this madness, but how. According to Shen, if he openly voiced his disapproval, they would kill him. If they went forward with it, he wouldn't live through the retaliatory strikes, and neither would half of his countrymen. He owed it to his country to stop it any way he could, but how. He remembered that he was going to meet the American Ambassador about a trade issue today, maybe the Americans could help. Fang decided it was his only option, and boldly decided he had to do it, even if it meant his death. Later that day, he met with the Ambassador, and made sure the Ambassador put his glass on a certain napkin that had a cryptic note on it. The Ambassador was no dummy, and saw the writing, and pocketed the note. He had Diplomatic Immunity, and if the Minister was so desperate to attempt contact like that, he knew that it was deadly serious. He knew his Charge de' affairs was a spook, and passed the note to him without a word other than telling him it came from Shen. Michael Stillman was indeed a Spook, and luckily he was the highest-placed spook in China, and TAPDANCED the message to Langley. They jumped on the translation. When the DDO read it, he hung a CRITIC on it and forwarded it to the White House. President Hatch's first outburst after reading it would have shocked his mother! He immediately called the Director's of the CIA and NSA and told them to give Minister Fang any assistance needed to get proof. The DDO knew that Fang preferred American Cross pens for his personal writing pens, and the NSA had one that could record and digitally store several hours worth of conversation, yet wouldn't show up on a standard scan. The NSA had several pens sent FEDEX overnight to the embassy, so they would have one that matched the minister's. Michael Stillman received the pens with 1 day to spare before the next meeting. He knew the minister preferred the brushed stainless Cross pens with a fine point, so he gave that pen to the Ambassador to give to Fang when he met the minister that morning. He switched pens with the minister, and Fang Yu went into the Politburo meeting.

Marshall Zang opened the meeting with an appeal to authorize the attacks.

"Comrades, if anything the situation has gotten worse. We will be out of food within 6 months,

and we barely have enough food to feed our military during the Pacific Transit.”

Minister Fang stood. “Marshall, can you go over the details of the plan again, I had a few questions.”

Marshall Zang assumed it was a delaying tactic, so he repeated the plan in a bored monotone. Unknown to him, Fang was recording the entire conversation. When he finished Zang asked for a vote for war. This time Fang didn’t object, but requested a week’s delay so he could make some preparations. Zang was stunned by Fang’s agreement, so he agreed to the week’s delay. Premier Xu polled the members of the Politburo for the amended war plan, and each member voted Yes, including Fang. He arranged to see the US Ambassador as soon as possible after the meeting, and the pen was sent to the NSA to be downloaded and decrypted. The entire conversation in the Politburo was recorded as cleanly as if they had dedicated mikes for each participant. President Hatch had a translated transcript on his desk 1 hour later, and he signed the EO authorizing a pre-emptive strike against the Council of Minister’s Building in Beijing during the Politburo’s next meeting that Wednesday night. A B-2 Stealth Bomber was dispatched from its base, and flown to Elmendorf, where it was refueled. Security was airtight since it was armed with 4 nuclear cruise missiles. Two to take out the Council of Ministers Building, and two to destroy the PLA Headquarters. It took off on schedule, and was in-flight refueled several times before penetrating Chinese airspace, and receiving the go code from President Hatch. Half an hour later, the Council of Ministers and the PLA headquarters went up with a blinding flash and a large mushroom cloud. NORAD waited for an hour on pins and needles for a retaliatory strike, but none ever occurred.

Once NORAD was sure that the coast was clear, and no birds were flying, President Hatch asked for an immediate nationwide live telecast.

“My Fellow Americans. It is with a heavy heart that I announce the US was forced to destroy the Council of Minister’s building in Beijing while the Politburo was meeting to make final preparations to launch a nuclear attack and invasion of the USA. We have no quarrel with the people of China. I was presented incontrovertible proof by Foreign Minister Fang Yu that next Wednesday, the People’s Liberation Army was going to launch an all-out nuclear attack against the US, then follow up with an invasion to conquer and subjugate the US. They wanted our wheat and oil, since they have had repeated crop failures. The ironic thing was all they had to do was ask, and we could have sold them enough wheat to feed their people, and all the oil they needed for domestic use. I guess their pride got in the way, and they got greedy. I have a word of warning for the remaining leadership of the People’s Republic of China. I have moved several boomers within close range of the entire country of China, and if we detect any launches or other hostile maneuvers they have already been ordered to attack on launch warning. We are indebted to Foreign Minister Fang Yu, who sacrificed his life to bring us this information. He perished in the attack, since his absence would have been noted, and they might have changed the meeting.

We hereby demand that the remaining government of China demilitarize to a level sufficient for National Defense, and destroy all nuclear missiles and warheads. We will perform our own verification, and there will be no negotiation of terms. To those of you who think I should have consulted Congress, the only thing I can say is I had to act immediately to defend the United States against an imminent attack, and if I hadn't acted, we would have been attacked, and I couldn't let that happen.

Premier Putin, I offer an olive branch of a demilitarized Asia, and the security of your southern border. We have no quarrel with Russia, who has been an ally of the United States for most of your history. We wish to continue to be your ally and friend. As soon as we see positive indications of demilitarization, we will begin shipping food aid to China, as well as experts to solve your crop failure problems.

Thank You, Good Night, and God Bless the USA!"

Ron was stunned when he watched the nationwide broadcast, and called Bear to ask if they needed to increase their security status. Bear didn't see any reason, since they had no Chinese residents, and if anyone wanted to mess with Alaska, they'd have to come through Russia, or fly a long distance. Vladimir Putin would probably enact measures to ensure that their southern border was secure, and deport all Chinese Nationals that were even remotely suspicious.

Meanwhile, back in Atlanta, Ralph and Samantha were coming out of the hospital after a long shift after dark, walking out to their SUV. They got within 12 feet of the vehicle when a young skinny black man stepped out of the shadows and said "Gimme yo wallet mo fo!"

Ron saw a blued revolver pointed shakily at them, so he said "Take it easy, here's my money clip" and reached with his left hand into his left front pocket, lifted the clip out of his pocket slowly and easily. Once the money clip was visible, Sam took several small steps to her left since she was on Ralph's left side, because George taught them never to walk with Ralph's gun hand occupied. The money clip was another idea of George's, it was a \$50.00 and 10 \$1 bills folded into a money clip with the \$50 showing, it was known as a distractor. With practiced ease, Ralph nervously flipped the clip 3 feet to the left of the dirtbag, whose attention was diverted by the clip. When the money landed he said, "Now give me the Bitch!", and looked Sam up and down as if he was undressing her with his eyes. With the dirtbags eyes off him, Ralph had slipped his right hand into his waistband and had a firing grip on his P-14. Realizing that he wasn't going to let them go and just take the money, Ralph drew and fired in one motion, hitting the dirtbag high in the right thigh, shattering his femur and probably severing his femoral artery. Ralph's second shot hit the dirtbag in his left shoulder. The dirtbag fell wounded and bleeding heavily to the ground, but still had his gun in his hand. As soon as Ralph started firing, Samantha reached into her purse and drew her gun. Her front sight locked on the Dirtbag's forehead, and she yelled "Drop the gun right now! Don't make me shoot you!" The Dirtbag made the wrong move and extended the gun to shoot Ralph, so Samantha finished squeezing the trigger, and 200 grains of jacketed hollow point lead entered the dirtbag's

forehead right above his nose, between his eyes, and the back of his head exploded, blowing brain matter all over the place. Ron stepped forward and kicked the revolver out of the dirtbag's hand, when off to his right he heard "Can someone help us?"

Ron holstered his gun and they checked out the call for help. A woman was lying on the ground next to a Crown Vic, and her husband was in a wheelchair next to her. Ron found out he was a Police Detective that had been shot in the leg in the line of duty, who had just been discharged to finish recuperating at home. He was in a wheelchair, and his wife was lying on the ground, and needed help getting back up. Seeing they were no threat, Sam holstered her gun too, and went to help the couple. They lifted his wife up and got her on her feet, and then the cop said he saw and heard the whole thing go down, and pushed his wife to the ground out of the line of fire and was able to look over the trunk of their car when the Dirtbag demanded that Ralph give him Samantha after he had tossed the money clip. Right then several cruisers showed up, and the police officer in the wheelchair was immediately recognized by them as a senior Atlanta detective. He told the officers exactly what happened, and they examined the scene. Ralph and Sam both showed the lead officer their Federal CCW's and driver's licenses. The computer check came back that they were indeed doctors at the hospital, and had valid federal CCW permits. Instead of taking them in, he recorded their statements, and the statement of the detective, and decided to release them OR.

The coroner and a photographer showed up, and Ron explained he had kicked the revolver over to where it lay, and the detective corroborated that the Dirtbag tried to shoot them even after being shot twice, and Sam's forehead shot was necessary to save their lives. A Supervisor showed up, and thought he recognized the Dirtbag as a 4-time looser who was on parole for armed robbery. Ralph wondered what a 4-time looser was doing out on parole, but didn't say anything. Sam got on her cell phone to George, who recommended an aggressive pro-gun defense attorney named James Francis. When she called Doc Richards, he told them that he was glad they were OK, and he'd pay any legal fees. When she told him the lawyer's name, Doc told her to mention his name, and he would probably take the case for nothing, since Doc had saved his brother's life years ago. Sam was amazed at how well Doc was connected. Finally, a Hospital Administrator showed up, and someone from Legal, since the parking lot was on Hospital property. Legal started asking why they were carrying on Hospital property and mouthing stuff like suspension. Ralph cut him off at the knees when he told him that they had retained James Francis Esq. as their defense attorney. The Hospital's legal rep shut up immediately, and the Administrator suggested they take a couple of days off. Ralph checked with the investigating officer, who said they were free to go, and if necessary, someone from the District Attorney's office would contact them. By now the Coroner had picked up the body and the shell casings, and had cleared the vehicle, so they could drive it home.

When they got home, there was a message from the law office of James Francis. Doc had called his office, and James would represent them personally and wouldn't charge a fee. He could see them tomorrow morning at 0900 in his office and he left the address. Ralph and Sam got in the shower, and then crawled into bed, drained from their experience. The next morning

they went to see James Francis. His personal office was larger than their living room, and the walls were paneled in dark oak, and lined with book cases full of law books. He stood up and shook their hands, then asked a legal stenographer to come in, and had them go over the whole incident again. He asked pointed questions, including their training, and what they were thinking. James knew George, and knew that if he trained them, it was almost certainly a legally righteous shoot since he knew the self-defense laws of Georgia and Atlanta almost as well as James did. When Ralph mentioned the Hospital's Legal rep's comment about suspension, James made a few notes, then told Ralph he had a few tricks up his sleeve to make any legal or civil problems go away. He was going to sue the hospital and the city jointly for Gross Negligence, specifically failure to maintain a safe workplace and failure to supervise and control the parolee among other things. He was sure that his PI could dig something up that would indicate that the Probation and Parole department screwed up, because he knew that they were understaffed and overloaded, with the Federal prison crowding issues, they were practically running a revolving door at the prison, releasing violent felons with less than 50% of their time served. He knew that if he asked for \$100 million dollars, which would be reasonable for 2 doctors' lifetime income and substantial punitive damages, that he could get the Hospital and City's attention, and make everything go away.

He told Ralph and Sam what he had in mind, and that playing hardball was the only way to make their problems go away forever, because otherwise the Hospital Legal staff would find a way to disarm them on Hospital property. They didn't even like having armed security guards due to the liability issues, and he knew that even if it went to trial, it was an excellent test case to hopefully change employer liability laws. He knew that if the hospital had the same security outside the building that several hospitals in other big cities had, this would never have happened. He was glad that Ralph and Anne held Federal CCW's because the Liberal City DA would be pre-empted by federal law against trying them for unauthorized carry. As soon as Ralph and Sam signed the retainer form, he had several paralegals working on the paperwork, and served the City and the Hospital that afternoon. 2 days later, he called them, and suggested they meet in his office; he had a proposal that could take care of the whole problem.

2 days later, the hospital administrator, the head of the Hospital legal department, the Deputy Assistant DA, and the City Attorney met in James Francis' office.
"Gentlemen, thanks for coming. I don't want to waste your time, so I wanted to propose a settlement to this case. You have the Coroner's report, and the reports of all officers and investigators involved. As you can see, this is clearly a righteous shoot.
My settlement terms are:

The hospital will install a secure parking lot for hospital employees
The City and State have to agree to dismiss any legal charges with prejudice.
There will be no legal or civil retaliation against my clients
They will be able to continue to carry concealed at work without any restrictions or repercussions
The City will investigate the Probation Department and correct any problems found

If the deceased's estate sues for wrongful death, the city and hospital will pay any costs including settlement with the plaintiffs, and reasonable legal fees.

This settlement is a 1-time take it or leave it offer, and is contingent upon absolute confidentiality.

You have 1 week from today to accept this offer, or we go to trial.

All parties must agree to this settlement, there will be no separate settlements.

James handed a copy of the settlement offer to each of the representatives, and told them to send their responses by either FEDEX or registered mail, and he had to have all their responses in hand within a week, or he was going through with the lawsuit.

1 week later, he had 5 signed settlement offers on his desk, including one from the State Attorney General's office promising that they weren't going to be charged in State Court. He called Ralph and Sam at home and gave them the good news.

Chapter 36 - Aftermath

Later that week, Ralph and Sam reported back for work. Ralph realized that their attorney must have some serious juice because no one from Hospital Administration said anything to them other than “Welcome Back” and they had already started construction of a 6-foot high chain link fence with 3 strands of barbed wire on top, mounted on anti-climb brackets that leaned to the outside of the fence. An armed security guard patrolled the perimeter 7 days a week, 24 hours a day while they finished the fence, the electric gate with pass cards, and the security cameras that kept watch over the entire parking lot. The head of the Legal department told the Hospital Board that they were getting off cheap, that James Francis had the best reputation in Atlanta for being a hard-nosed jurist who almost always won his cases, and didn’t back down for anyone. He had been telling the board for years to install security, and if his memos had come out during discovery, they would have been damning to the point that any competent judge would have found for the plaintiffs and awarded huge punitive damages way in excess of the initial demand. The fence only cost less than \$50 Thousand including the gate, and the security cameras were a good idea anyway. He hoped that between the cameras and the signs, the dirtbags would move a couple of blocks away from the hospital, and eliminate the problem.

The District Attorney was livid, and knew that he had been totally outclassed by a superior attorney, who had an airtight case. He had been trying ever since he was elected to legally disarm everyone in Atlanta because he hated guns and blamed them for everything that was wrong with Atlanta, not realizing that the City’s Socialist mentality actually attracted scumbags to the city like ants to honey. He was glad this case didn’t go to trial, because that little SOB was right, even a jury full of retards could see this was a classic Righteous Shooting. The stupid criminal was offered the money, and instead of taking it and running, he attempted to kidnap and possibly rape the victim. Not even a bunch of Liberal New Yorkers would have much sympathy for a 4-time looser who got shot while attempting not only Armed Robbery, but possibly Kidnapping and Rape, even though the other 2 never happened, his intent was clear. Then that damned Detective had to go and stick his nose in it. The ironic thing was he was too senior for the DA to mess with him, and he would probably either get moved to a desk or medically retire due to the leg injury. He was hoping to use his career as District Attorney to run for Mayor of Atlanta, and now that was in doubt, because several people in the know knew that James Francis had beat his pants off in this case, and forced the City and the State to back off, or face a huge lawsuit.

Next Wednesday, Ralph and Sam showed up for their Wednesday night meeting, and George took them aside and gave them both hugs, and told them “Well done!” He had obtained a copy of the police reports through James Francis’ office, and read through it. Ralph’s shooting wasn’t too good, but George theorized that Ralph didn’t bother pulling the gun up to a Weaver stance, and shot from the hip as soon as the gun cleared, using his body to index and aim. The Coroner’s report showed a shattered right femur, lacerated femoral artery, shattered left collarbone, and another entry wound right above the bridge of the nose resulting in the

destruction of the Medulla Oblongata and the immediate cause of death. George knew the MO was a fairly small target, but if you hit it, it was Lights Out and Hasta La Vista Baby. Through either training or luck, Samantha hit the Dirtbag in the one spot that could instantly stop the fight. When the rest of the group gathered, George asked Ralph and Sam if it were OK for the group to hear their story, and for George to debrief them. When they finished telling their story, the rest of the group looked at them in total shock. They all knew it could have been them that it happened to, and they knew that none of them besides Ralph and Sam were prepared to deal with it. Suddenly their meeting took on an urgent air. Even the Pacifists were now firmly in George's camp, and were in no mood to back down. They realized that all their non-violence and pacifism would not matter one bit to a criminal intent on stealing what they had.

George collected the pairs of grey sweats that he told everyone to bring, and went out back to a 55-gallon drum half full of water, added a packet of RIT black dye, then loaded all the sweat suits into the drum, and stirred them with a stick until they were thoroughly dyed black. Using the same stick, he fished the sweats out of the drum and fed them through a hand-cranked clothes wringer that got most of the water out, and handed Ralph a poncho and rubber gloves, and told him to hang up the sweats without getting any dye on his skin. There was a clothesline already set up with spring clips, and he carefully hung them up to dry. One of the ladies asked why they didn't just use a commercial dryer, and George asked her if she would like to be the first person to use that dryer after they dried their damp sweats?

She realized that she didn't really think about that, and George used it as an object lesson. "People, if TSHTF, I can guarantee that society will be much more polite, and you'll have to consider the impact of what you do on everyone else in your group. Consideration, Courtesy, and Common Sense will be the watchwords. Remember the old saying "An Armed Society is a Polite Society." The West wasn't as wild as Hollywood made it out to be, but it was polite. You didn't go out of your way to offend someone who was openly carrying a Colt .45 Peacemaker!"

That remark got a couple of chuckles, and finally they were done dyeing and hanging the clothes. Ralph took off the poncho, and Sam checked him for dye spots. She was amazed when he didn't have a spot on him - she guessed he could be careful when it counted. While the clothes dried, they went back inside to start their classroom study of being sneaky as George called it. He started writing the basic rules of being sneaky on the chalkboard:

Stay in the shadows

Stay low

Don't get backlit

Be Quiet

Don't take the obvious approach

If you can, crawl instead of walking

Don't move in straight lines

Any time someone is looking remotely your way, freeze. The eye sees movement.

At night, don't look right at something, look to the side of it, or scan.

Cheat!

George then handed them a copy of Dick Marcinko's famous 10 Rules of Specwar:

I am the War Lord and the wrathful God of Combat and I will always lead you from the front, not the rear.

I will treat you all alike - just like shit.

Thou shalt do nothing I will not do first, and thus you will be created Warriors in My deadly image.

I shall punish thy bodies because the more thou sweatest in training, the less thou bleedest in combat.

Indeed, if thou hurteth in thy efforts, and thou suffer painful dings, the thou art Doing It Right. Thou has not to like it - thou hast just to do it.

Thou shalt Keep It Simple, Stupid.

Thou shalt never assume.

Verily, thou art not paid for thy methods, but for thy results, by which meaneth thou shalt kill thine enemy before he killeth you by any means available.

Thou shalt, in thy Warrior's Mind and Soul, always remember my ultimate and final Commandment: There Are No Rules - Thou Shalt Win at All Cost.

Several of the more pacifist docs laughed after they read them until George thundered "You think this is FUNNY! Damn it! If the stinky stuff hits the rotating blade - who you gonna call? The Cops will be out of business, and you will be on your own. I can guarantee that every Dirtbag is the world that is planning on surviving either has studied this stuff, or has the real-world experience to know it intuitively. You cake-eating Civilians have had it so easy for so long, you've forgotten how brutal things can get when Law and Order collapses. That little hurricane that hit Florida only disrupted things for less than a week, yet they had rampant looting, and probably a bunch of unreported robberies and murders they'll discover later. If that was only a couple of days after a minor disaster, imagine how bad things could get if it really hits the fan?"

George's "Drill Instructor From Hell" impersonation and what happened to Ralph and Sam stopped them dead in their tracks, and got them thinking in uncomfortable directions. George went on "You guys have all the fancy gear, but don't have a clue how to use it. You might be good at punching paper, but what about shooting a real human who is shooting back at you? You know zip about Tactics, yet you act like a bunch of know-it-alls. We've got a limited time here to get you guys up to speed, for all we know, something could happen tomorrow that would do away with civilization as we know it. Believe me, it wouldn't take much!"

George spent the rest of the evening talking about basic tactics. He was encouraged to see they were taking notes. He told them when they met next week that they would start practicing this

stuff in the woods out back of his studio, which was also his house. He had 10 acres of land out back, and he hadn't cleared it out for years, so it was in its natural wild state, which was perfect for teaching this bunch of Newbies how to move through the wilderness. The first things he would teach them was the simple Patrol File, or how to move as group in low threat areas. He hoped one of them had enough woods skills to act as point man; otherwise they were doomed from the start. They went over map and compass use, and wilderness navigation, pace counting techniques, and a bunch of other stuff.

Ralph and Sam were tired when they got home, but after they had a shower together, they wound up making love the rest of the night. They were dragging the next day at work, but were used to it from their internships and residencies. Somehow they got through the day, and went out for dinner that night at a local Chinese restaurant, since they didn't feel like cooking. As they were departing the restaurant, Ralph was in condition Orange, and spotted something he didn't like, so they retreated back into the restaurant, and asked the manager to call the cops, because there was a small group of black men loitering in the parking lot, and Ralph thought he spotted a concealed gun on them, and told the manager they might be getting ready to rob the place. The police arrived a couple of minutes later code 2, and managed to corral the gang. When the police frisked them, several were carrying pistols, and one of them had a sawed-off shotgun. The kicker was the black masks in their pockets.

When they were taken downtown and fingerprinted, several turned out to be ex-cons with several armed robberies on their rap sheets. The police officer interviewed Sam and Ralph, and thanked them for spotting the robbers. The manager refunded their money for dinner, and handed them his card with some Chinese characters on it, which he said would entitle them to 2 free meals whenever they visited the restaurant for as long as they cared to use it. The manager said they had gotten robbed several times before, and it was usually right before they were going to make a bank run. Ralph suggested they might have someone inside. The manager's eyes went wide, then realized that Ralph was right. He remembered hiring a dishwasher with a shady past about a month before the robberies started. He called the police supervisor back into the building, and told him about Ralph's theory, and the coincidence of the robberies starting a month after they hired a new dishwasher. He was in the back working, so the supervisor told the manager to come in back and point him out. Two officers accompanied them, and 2 minutes later, they led the dishwasher out in cuffs. The manager was very grateful, over the last 6 months, they had been robbed twice, and each time they lost several thousand dollars. Ralph suggested they run any new employees through the PD and have them run a quick check on them, it was cheaper than paying for increased insurance payments or a funeral. The Manager thought that was an excellent idea, and told them to come back whenever they wanted. Ralph and Sam got home later that night, and were so exhausted that they just took a shower and crawled into bed.

The next day they read the papers, and were grateful that the police supervisor had managed to keep their names out of the paper. Ralph hoped the supervisor remembered their names from the shootout, and decided the last thing they wanted was the publicity. They went to work as if

nothing happened, and when they met at George's on Wednesday, Ralph told George about the incident. The three of them sat down and talked about it until the rest of the group got there. George told Ralph he did everything correctly as far as he could see, and he was impressed that his Situational Awareness was improving. Most Civilians would have blundered right into the group, and probably gotten robbed or car jacked, since crooks are opportunistic. The rest of the group showed up, and they got on with that night's training. They all changed into their sweats, and met out back. George showed them how to apply greasepaint to their skins to darken their skins, except Gary, who might want to lighten his up a shade or two! Gary took the good-natured ribbing, and asked them how you located a black man in a dark alley, when they gave up he said "Tell him a joke and wait for the smile." Everyone got a good laugh at that, and after they had their make up on, he handed them an inexpensive black mask to pull over their heads. Ralph said "If we're wearing masks, why the black face?"

George pulled his on without first putting on his black face to show them the areas around the eyes stood out like a sore thumb, and the area around the mouth was visible. He said "Besides, sometimes it's too hot to wear masks, and the black face helps until you start sweating. If you're in the tropics, mix some military DEET with the cammo so it goes on better, and it keeps the bugs away." With that he said "Follow me single file, and be quiet." He knew the last order was hopeless, but he wanted them to have a comparison for later when they really could move quietly, if they made it that far. Things were looking up. With the incident involving Ralph and Sam, they got serious, and quit goofing off.

Two weeks later, they decided to go to the Chinese restaurant near their apartment, and the manager recognized them, and greeted them like long-lost relatives. He escorted them to the best table, and asked if it were OK for him to order for them. When Ralph said OK, the manager went in back, and had a brief conversation with the cook. Half an hour later, three waiters carried platters of very expensive and fancy Chinese dishes. Ralph did not know what most of them were, but the presentation was beautiful, including vegetables carved like dragons, Peking Duck, General Tso's Chicken, a Mongolian Barbeque, and a very fancy presentation of Sweet and Sour pork with a flaming sauce and carved carrots. Ralph knew that they could never eat all that food, and asked the Manager if he could join them. He looked around, and the restaurant was slow, so he went in back, brought out his wife, and joined them for dinner. They both spoke fluent English with a Southern accent. Over dinner, they found out that they were from Hong Kong, and left to avoid becoming Chinese citizens again. They were both educated in the US, and moved back to Hong Kong to start a business. When they moved to the US, and became citizens, they took on American names, and spoke mostly English, except with the ancient cook, who turned out to be their 70-yr old Uncle, who could have retired, but loved to cook. Ralph told Tom and Violet they were ER docs at the local hospital, and their apartment was right around the corner. Tom said that in Oriental culture, the most respected man in the village was the village healer. They talked for almost an hour, and when the meal was done, Ralph asked if he could go in the back and thank the cook personally. Tom said he would be honored, and he'd have to accompany them since Uncle Charlie spoke very little English. When they walked back to the kitchen, Tom got his uncle's attention, spoke to him briefly in

Chinese, and they turned to Ralph. “Uncle Charlie, I wanted to thank you for that delicious meal, I can tell you really care about cooking, and go to meticulous detail to make your dishes perfect. Thank you very much!”

Ralph bowed at the waist like an oriental, and came back up slowly. Charlie started rattling off to Tom in Chinese, then Tom translated “Uncle Charlie says you are most welcome, and it is we who are grateful for you stopping those brigands from stealing from us. Please feel free to drop in anytime, we’d like to be your friends.”

“I’d like that Uncle Charlie, Merci Beaucoup!”

“Vous parlez français ? J’ai appris quand j’étais au Vietnam avant la guerre.”

“I’m Cajun de Louisiane. J’ai récemment réappris Cajun ainsi je pourrais traiter des personnes dans le bayou.”

Ralph and Charlie carried on in French as Tom stood in amazement. Finally Charlie dropped his cleaver, wiped his hands, and shook Ralph’s hand. When they walked back out to the table, Tom said that he had made a friend, and Charlie felt isolated since he could only converse with Tom and Violet since no one else spoke Chinese in the neighborhood. Ralph suggested that they come over some time when Charlie could join them, since Sam spoke Cajun almost as well as he did since she had to help him learn while they were engaged. Tom suggested if they wanted to come over any night for a late dinner, if they could call first, they could close the restaurant and dine comme la famille. Ralph thought that was an excellent idea, and he’d take them up on it. He didn’t get too many chances to practice his French any more. Tom said they could come over anytime, not just for a late dinner. They got up, and Ralph shook Tom’s hand, and Sam gave Violet a “girl hug” then they left. Remembering last time, Ralph stopped in the doorway, scanned the entire area, and it was perfectly normal. Samantha walked on Ron’s left, and they kept their hands free. Ralph had his car keys out, and Sam swept the area around their car quickly with her Surefire flashlight. No one was around, so they got in and drove home.

Chapter 37 - Country Home

Things were going so well at Allakaket Airlines that BA told Ron to take a couple of months off with the family at their lodge up north. They packed up their stuff and loaded it aboard the Super Goose. Steve flew the SG with one of the baggage handlers to help unload while Ron and his family traveled in the 007, since the Super Goose was stuffed. The entourage landed at the lodge, then the SG touched down and taxied to the cabin after the 007 cleared out. It took a day to get organized and get everything cleaned up. The kids were 3 years older than the last time they went to the cabin, so Ron was hoping they would want to go hunting and fishing with Mom and Dad. Jake, who had just turned 13, was looking forward to shooting his first Caribou, and had been practicing with Dad's Browning A-bolt .308 at the 300-yard range owned by Alaska Survival. Ron turned out to be a pretty good shooting coach, and Jake wasn't quite the marksman his dad was, but he could shoot a 4-inch group at 300 yards shooting Military Prone, and a 3-inch group at 300 yards off the bipod. Ron agreed to let him use the bipod, since they weren't shooting for score, and he wanted Josh to get a clean humane kill.

Before they left, Ron sat down with his kids and explained life in Alaska was different from most of the United States since everyone that didn't live in the big cities were subsistence hunters, or else worked for a hunting lodge, or in some capacity related to hunting. He disagreed with trophy hunting on an ethical basis, but at least trophy hunters in Alaska didn't waste the meat like they did in some places. For his 13th birthday, Jake got a Ruger 22/45 that belonged to his Grandpa, and got his Grandma's set of knifes, since she said she was too old to hunt anymore. Ron had made suitable fanny packs for all 4 kids. Jake, Josh and Sarah had graduated from shooting their .22 Chipmunks to shooting a competition grade 10/22 with the Volquartsen trigger group, match barrel, and overmolded stock., and a whole bunch of bells and whistles. Their guns cost more than Ron's Browning A-bolt, but they could shoot on the average a group smaller than $\frac{1}{2}$ " at 100 yards. They had since graduated to AR-15 HBAR rifles with nice scopes, and were shooting with Jake at Alaska Survival with Bear's two sons, Tom and Gary. They were Jake and Josh's age, and had grown up shooting even before Ron's kids. Since they weren't allowed to shoot them in the Junior Shooter's program, they kept shooting their .22's until they were old enough to compete in the Open division with their Dad. Tom and Gary turned out to be plenty of competition for Ron's kids, since they had the home field advantage, and could practice at the 300-yard range whenever they wanted, unless their Dad was running a shooting class, or there was too much snow on the ground. Bear decided to wait a year before allowing Tom and Gary go hunting, so Jake would be the only kid in their group to go hunting this year, and the main reason was Ron was tired of waiting for his kids to get old enough to go hunting with them.

They had purchased 3 ATV's, so Ron, Jake, and Nancy drove an ATV each, and Nancy towed a custom-built trailer with 3 safety seats for Josh, Sarah, and David. Ron and Jake each carried part of their camping gear with enough room on the trailer to carry a caribou skin, and a trash bag full of meat. Ron and Jake each carried a cased Browning A-bolt on the back of their

ATV's. Ron and Nancy both had their double shoulder holsters, and Jake had a single shoulder holster for his 22/45 with 3 mags on the off-side to help equalize the load. All 3 of them wore their fanny packs and knives. Josh, Sarah, and David had smaller fanny packs containing age-appropriate equipment. Ron bought a huge family tent and self-inflating sleeping pads for everyone. When he got a look at the pile of stuff they were bringing, he thought they were on an African Safari. Moose decided to jog along next to them the first day, and they made pretty good time to the campground. It took several hours to set up the tent with the 4 kids helping. If Ron and Nancy did it by themselves, it would have been up in less than half an hour. Ron had a brilliant idea, and sent the kids looking for stones for a fire ring, and told them to keep close.

While they picked up stones, Ron and Nancy got the tent set up quickly. Ron gathered the stones into a circle, and showed the kids how to safely start a fire, and all the tricks involved. They watched their dad with fascination, until they realized they had seen this hundreds of times before when Dad lit a fire in the fireplace. Only Jake paid enough attention to notice Ron wasn't using a match, instead he was using flint and steel, and a piece of char cloth to catch the spark. He set the char cloth in a small pile of pitchy pine sawdust that he had brought from home, struck the flint with the steel, and threw a shower of sparks into the char cloth. Ron blew gently until the spark burst into flame, then he slid the whole pile into the center of the fire circle, and carefully laid a tepee of tiny twigs over it, and as they caught, he added larger and larger sticks, until he had a nice fire going. Meanwhile, Nancy had set up the propane stove on the stand, and was about to make dinner. She liked modern conveniences!

Ron told Jake how to cook on an open fire, but admitted that cooking on a propane stove was easier and safer, but you couldn't always rely on having one. While Nancy made dinner, Ron told his son about his grandfather Roy, and how he survived a year in the wild, living in a tiny trapper's cabin for a year before he could build a dugout canoe and ride the river down to Allakaket. Jake had heard about his Grandpa from his grandmother, but hearing his father tell it to him out in the wilderness somehow brought a deeper understanding to Jake. Josh, Sarah, and David gathered around to here the story too, but Ron was concentrating on Jake, since Ron felt Jake was ready to learn survival skills, and was old enough to be responsible. He told them how Roy crash landed at their lake, and swam to the shore, made a fire while he was wet, cold, and shivering with only what he carried in his fanny pack. Jake looked in his pack, and wondered if he could survive for a year with just the contents of his pack, and realized he couldn't, and he had a lot to learn. Ron told him that if he wanted to, he would add lessons in Wilderness Survival to the lessons he was learning at home. Jake liked that a lot. Ron pulled a memo pad out of his fanny pack, and made some notes, including what order to teach Jake the skills he would need to survive in the wilderness. He realized his kids had been raised in a town, instead of in a log cabin, and didn't have the daily experiences he had growing up. He'd have to make up for lost time.

The next morning, they were up at first light, and they quickly broke camp, and Jake helped his dad to make sure the fire was out. Once everything that they brought was packed up, they put on their helmets, and headed to the caribou grounds. Later that afternoon, they arrived at the foot of the hill, and Ron shut his ATV off, and told everyone that they had to be absolutely quiet from here on out, or they would spook the game, and they would have wasted at trip. They got off the ATV's as quietly as possible, and uncased their rifles. They already had the magazines loaded. Nancy took the 3 younger kids aside while they loaded the guns, and she handed out hearing protection. Ron and Jake took their rifles and shooting pads, and hiked over the hill. Nancy, the kids and Moose followed a ways behind and crested the top of the hill where they were out of the way. Ron and Jake set up, and selected 2 mature bulls. Ron told Jake to take the one that was about 150 yards away and on the right, and he'd take the one on the left. Jake got in a good stable shooting position, extended the bipod legs, took the scope covers off, cycled the action, and sighted through the scope. Once the crosshairs were centered on the heart/lung region of the bull, he looked over at his Dad, who gave him a Thumbs up. Jake got back behind the scope, and the bull's heart was still in the center of the crosshairs, so he flipped off the safety, and took a shooting grip on the rifle, and moved his right index finger to the trigger. The scope was still centered on the bull's heart, so he took 3 deep breaths, and blew half the 3rd one out, held his breath, and gently squeezed the trigger. Jake's gun roared, and Ron's went off a second later. Jake could see the caribou bull stagger and fall to the ground after taking 2 steps, so he knew it was dead. He set the safety so he could cycle the action, but lock the trigger, and unloaded his rifle just like his Dad showed him. They picked up their rifles and shooting pads, and hiked back over the hill to their ATVs, cased the rifles, and everyone got back on board for the short ride over the hill. Ron was amazed that he didn't hear a peep out of Moose during all the excitement. When the 3 ATV's crested the hill, the herd spooked, and they drove right up to the kills. They shut off their ATV's, and went over to check the carcasses. Ron saw that Jake had put a bullet right where he should, so he gave him a big hug and said "Well Done Jake - now we get to skin, gut, and butcher the caribou."

Jake took his Bowie knife just like his dad had told him, slit the throat of his bull to let it bleed, then stuck the skinner blade side up into the breast of the bull, and easily penetrated the hide. He quickly opened the hide right down the midline of the belly where he reached the sex organs of the bull. Ron told him to just cut around them, and he'd help him split the pelvis and finish the job. Ron spilt the pelvis with one blow from his Ulu/hatchet, and quickly removed the sex organs and anus of the bull. He tied a knot in the colon to keep the contents from contaminating the meat and helped Jake remove the internal organs. Jake thought it was kind of gross, but knew it was part of hunting to skin, gut, and butcher your own animal. You owed it to the animal not to waste anything by not doing the job right. Once they had the skin off, Ron showed Jake how to brain tan the hide, and almost lost his cookies when he smelled what the contents of the skull smelled like. Ron handed him a jar of Vicks Vaporub and told him to put a small amount under his nose, which would kill the smell. Jake felt better with the Vicks, and helped his father mash all the brains into the hide. When they were finished, Ron and Jake washed their hands very thoroughly; Jake didn't want to smell like that any longer than he had to!

Once both carcasses had cooled, Ron showed Jake how to butcher the animal and remove the cuts of meat they wanted. Once Jake got started, Ron took his Ulu/hatchet and expertly butchered his bull, Mary and April were excellent teachers, and he used the Ulu part of the blade like an Intuit would, and as a result, it took half as long as before to butcher the bull. They put the meat they wanted to keep into a trash bag, rolled up the skins, and piled everything back on the trailers. Since Nancy thought that they had stunk up the area butchering the bulls, she suggested they camp on the other side of the hill, so they all got onboard their ATVs and drove over the hill. With 2 hours of daylight left, Ron knew he couldn't make it home safely with his family, so they made camp. This time Ron and Nancy put the tent up by themselves, and had it up in plenty of time. Moose kept the 4 kids occupied, and earned Ron and Nancy's praise. Ron and Jake built another fire, and since they had the time, Ron showed Jake how to use flint and steel to start a fire. After a couple of tries, he got pretty good at striking sparks, so Ron decided to let him try the whole procedure. He had Jake put a small pile of sawdust in his hand, place a piece of char cloth in the middle, and after 3 attempts, he threw a spark right into the char cloth. He blew gently just like his dad told him, and was rewarded with a baby flame. While it was still manageable, he carefully set it down in the center of the fire ring, took several small twigs, and arranged them in a tepee fashion over the little flame. As the twigs caught, he added more wood and gradually bigger pieces, until he had a nice big fire going. Ron hugged the stuffing out of Jake, and said "Son, you've learned the most important skill for wilderness survival - how to build a fire. Doing it the old-fashioned way is the hardest but the most reliable. Later, I'll show you my fool-proof methods."

While they were playing Jeremiah Johnson, Nancy had assembled the stand and the propane stove, and had started dinner. An hour later, dinner was served. Nancy brought several jars of caribou stew, since she knew it would be simple to fix, and only used the Dutch oven, making clean-up easy as well. They roasted marshmallows over the fire for dessert, and finally it was bedtime, because Ron wanted to be up early so they could make it home tomorrow. They climbed into their sleeping bags, and the kids huddled around Moose who was looking pretty old but was in good shape for an older dog. Evidently he was lucky not to have any disabling genetic defects like hip dysplasia. Ron and Nancy slept on the other side of the tent, and as soon as it was light, they were up and about. Nancy fixed oatmeal with cinnamon, brown sugar and raisins, just like they liked it. Once breakfast was finished, and the dishes cleaned, they packed up and headed for home.

They got back to the lodge 2 hours later, and parked the ATVs in their "garage" next to the snow blower. Ron and Jake carried the Caribou meat into the kitchen, laid a tarp over the table to make cleaning the mess up easier while Nancy got the three younger kids settled and broke out the canning gear and jars. Ron did most of the packing and slicing, while Jake helped out his mom and dad where he could. Once Ron had all the meat packed, he remembered he needed to take the skins to the lake and rinse them off, then spread them over the smokehouse roof. He put his fanny pack and shoulder pack back on, grabbed the bundle of skins and secured them to the back of the ATV and drove to the lake. Once they were thoroughly rinsed, he rolled them back up and drove back to the lodge. Jake was splitting wood for the stove when

he came back. Ron was glad to see Jake was being careful. Ron parked the ATV and carried the skins to the smokehouse. Jake helped his dad spread them on the smokehouse roof, then he went back to splitting wood. After dinner, they gathered around the fireplace and Ron read them a story out of his Children's Bible, then the kids said goodnight and went to bed.

After breakfast, Ron asked them if they wanted to go fishing, and of course they said "yes!" They gathered their gear and walked to the lake, with Ron and Nancy keeping a careful lookout for predators. Soon they all had a couple of fish on their stringers, and these weren't little fish either, the lake trout they caught ranged from 2-10 pounds in weight. Ron was glad that he had that outdoor fish cleaning table installed. He realized that the outside tap wasn't being used, so he had someone build a large table next to the lodge, and route a water line to it. They covered the table with Formica so it wouldn't hold the fish smell, and the basin at one end of the table drained into a 5-gallon bucket which they dumped into what used to be the garden, but was now a hole in the ground to compost wastes that would enrich the soil. Ron knew that if he ever needed to use that garden again, it would be some of the richest soil in the neighborhood! Ron showed them how to open and gut a fish. He was amazed that Sarah wasn't the least bit squeamish, but probably didn't want to "act like a girl" in front of her brothers. Nancy made a huge fish fry for dinner with "freedom fries" Ron couldn't bear to call them French Fries!

The next day, Bear called and asked if they wanted to go shooting. Ron asked the kids, and the resounding YES told him that they were going to Alaskan Survival to go shooting with Tom and Gary. Bear said he'd send the 007 down for them. They got ready, and less than an hour, they heard the roar of a helicopter coming in for a landing. They carried their cased rifles on board, strapped into the VIP seats, and 30 minutes later they landed at Bear's compound. Tom and Gary were there to greet them, and they walked down to the shooting range. Bear brought a 50-cal ammo can full of 5.56 ammo and .308 ammo. Ron had brought his National Match Springfield M1-a to shoot against Bear. They walked to their individual lanes, and got ready. They all laid down their shooting mats, and loaded mags full of ammo. Ron and Bear were pretty equal on the 600 yard line since Ron was not allowed to use a scope. If he had a scope mounted on his rifle, it wouldn't have been even close, but Bear insisted that Ron learn to shoot with open sights, because he said that if the scope got damaged, he'd have to be able to shoot just as well with open sights. Since Ron couldn't see his bullet strikes, he had to learn how to shoot long-distance with open sights. Fortunately, Bear had mercy on him, and showed him the techniques he needed to shoot without a scope. Ron muttered more than once under his breath that he'd rather carry a spare scope, but he realized Bear did have a point, even if it was on top of his head! Finally after shooting a half-dozen 6-inch groups, Ron had enough, and when the shooting stopped Ron hopped on the ATV and drove down to the target line and put a B-27 silhouette target up with 2 1-inch orange dots on it: 1 over the heart, and 1 over the forehead where it would disrupt the M.O.

He drove back to the line, and while everyone else resumed shooting, he took the rear sight off his Picatinny rail, and mounted the Leupold Mark III scope with the QD rings, and set up. 2 shots later, Bear knew that Ron would be far more useful as a sniper than shooting with open

sights, and told him to keep the scope mounted, but keep the rear sight in his carry case just in case. Later when they pulled the targets, there were 2 holes in Ron's target, right in the center of the orange dots. Ron's kids had never seen him shoot a scoped rifle at 600 yards before, and were amazed. Jake remembered some rumors he heard about his Dad's shooting ability, and realized that those rumors, which he dismissed as tall tales, were true. He resolved then and there to really try, since he should be a much better shooter. Jake had a talk with his Dad, and the rest of the day, Ron worked with his son shooting the scoped National Match M-1a at the 600-yard line. Slowly Jake's shooting improved. Ron was glad, because he feared that none of his kids had inherited his shooting ability. Now he realized he just had to push and encourage them to try to shoot farther and farther. All the kids in Allakaket were shooting at the 100-yard range, so Ron didn't think that they were any different. Ron suggested Sarah, Josh, and David try the 300-yard range, which was about the limit of effective range of their AR-15's. While they weren't sniper accurate with the open sights, they were both able to put a 20-round magazine in the "Minute of Dirtbag" zone. Ron asked Bear if he could get some 3x9x40 QD scopes out of inventory and boresight them. Bear grabbed their rifles and drove back to the compound, and came back 30 minutes later with a Simmons 3x9x40 AO scope mounted on each rifle with QD rings. Ron left Jake shooting by himself on the 600-yard line, and concentrated on Josh, Sarah, and David for the rest of the afternoon. After some coaching and training, the 3 of them were shooting much smaller groups than before at the 300-yard targets. Ron told them to keep it up, and measure their group size, and they should notice their group sizes shrinking. By the end of the day, they had gone from shooting 6-inch groups to 5-inch groups while using scopes shooting prone on the 300-yard line. Ron was one proud papa!

Chapter 38 - National Shooting Team

They made a daily trip to the shooting range since Ron had managed to get all 4 of his kids hooked on long-range shooting. Jake shot Ron's Springfield Armory National Match M-1a at the 600-yard line, while Josh, Sarah, and David were shooting the scoped AR-15s. Jake's group size slowly shrank from 8 inches to 6 inches. Ron was watching his eldest son shoot, and spotted something. When Jake had finished shooting, he sat down next to him, and asked him if he would mind some help. Jake was frustrated he couldn't shoot smaller groups than 6 inches, so he said yes. Ron had Jake fold up the bipod, and assume the Classic Military prone position. Once he got into the proper position, Jake realized what he was doing wrong, and shot a 5-inch group shooting Military prone. Ron told him to put the bipod back down, and the group size reduced to 4 inches. Jake was so happy that he could have floated all the way home. Ron told him it was all practice from there on out, and learning to concentrate. He told Jake that before he shot if he was nervous, he recited the 23rd psalm, and it calmed him right down. Bear told Jake that Ron was so good at concentrating when he shot that he was pretty sure he wouldn't notice a grenade going off once he was in the zone. Jake asked Bear what the Zone was. Ron explained that it was an area of intense concentration that allowed him to shoot super-small groups. The only thing he saw and thought of was his image of the target through the scope.

Ron stood up, and grabbed his cell phone, and called Gene Shepard "General, I'm here with Bear and my kids teaching Jake how to shoot long distance. I wanted to know if it were OK to tell Jake about the Barrett's shooting project."

"Sure, just don't tell him anything about the Bradley or the LAV-25 since they're still considered Top Secret."

"Thanks Gene!"

Ron walked back over to Jake. "That was Gene; he told me it was OK to tell you about a Military project I was involved in at your age. I grew up at our lodge except it was a little 2-room cabin back then, and I learned to shoot much younger than you did, and quickly started shooting my mom's Browning A-bolt - That's Grandma, anyway, Uncle Steve showed up at our cabin one day, and we were shooting at 12-inch logs from our porch to the lake. The farthest shot was 400 yards. When I shot a 2-inch group at 400 yards, Steve almost fainted. One thing lead to another and Steve invited us to MacDill AFB in Florida where he worked. He really wanted to show me off to his Boss, General Gene Shepard. They set me up on the 400 yard line with my Browning A-bolt, and after I fired a test round to make sure I doped the wind correctly, then I shot a 4-shot group of 1.092 inches. The General asked me to shoot at the 600-yard target, and I shot a 2.092 inch group. General Shepard told me that the best shooter on the Air Force Shooting Team only shot a 1.98 inch group at 600 yards prone.

"Holy Cow Dad, why didn't you tell me?"

"Until now it was a classified Government project, I couldn't even talk to your Mom about everything I did. If you want to try some really long distance shooting, I'm sure we can go the Elmendorf and shoot my Barretts 50-cal rifle at their 1,000 yard range."

"Thousand Yards? I can barely see good enough to shoot at the 600-yard line, I can see the target Ok, but I can't see my bullet holes, or I'd use them as an aiming point and shoot much smaller groups."

"You won't believe this rifle, the scope is 3 times the size of the one you're using now, and the gun itself is almost twice as long. It's got a suppressor on it, but the round is supersonic, so you still need to wear hearing protection."

"Why suppress the gun if you can still hear it?"

"Because the suppressor also suppresses muzzle blast, which is the biggest component of the recoil of the BMG .50 round. During Desert Storm, US snipers could only fire a round or two, then they'd have to move because the muzzle blast disturbed enough dust to mark their shooting position. With the muzzle suppressor, the blast is almost non-existent, and it actually makes the gun more accurate. When I was your age, I shot a 10-inch group with the older model in front of General Shepard at 1,000 yards."

"Yikes, talk about pressure! I've got enough problems shooting in front of you!"

"If I can get permission to bring you on base at Elmendorf, we can shoot the Barretts at their 1,000 yard range. I'm sure you'll like it."

"Thanks Dad, I'd love to go, just let me know when."

"If I can get permission, it should be in the next couple of days, so practice up."

Jake went back to practicing shooting at the 600-yard line with renewed enthusiasm. He hoped his dad could get permission. When he looked through the scope, he saw the image was more jittery than last time. Remembering his father's advice, he tried all the techniques he had told him to slow down his breathing and pulse. Finally he started reciting the 23rd Psalm "The Lord is my Shepherd..." by the time he finished the psalm, he looked through the scope, and it looked like the gun was mounted in a rifle rest. Once the bullseye was centered in the crosshairs, he gently squeezed the trigger, and was rewarded with his first x-ring round, right in the center of the bullseye. When he came back to the scope it was wiggling again, so he started reciting the 23rd Psalm in his mind again. This time he didn't even remember touching the trigger. When he looked at the target again, he had 5 holes in the target in a nice tight group. He realized that he must have finally gotten into the mythical Zone his dad was always telling him about. Ron was watching through the spotting scope, and realized about the same time Jake did that his son was in the Zone. He said a quick prayer of thanksgiving, then walked

forward to give his son a big hug.

When Josh, Sarah, David, and Bear's boys were done shooting, Ron walked down with Jake to retrieve his target. When they measured his group, and subtracted the bullet diameter, Ron told Jake he had just shot a 3" group at 600 yards. Ron picked Jake up and spun him around. Seeing all the commotion, Bear wandered over, and Ron explained what Jake had just did. Bear proceeded to give Jake a Bear hug, until he felt a thump on his forearm, and realized he was squeezing too hard. He set Jake back down, and was talking to him about the first time he met his dad, and how Ron had impressed all those SF shooting instructors, and had a target still up at the DELTA officer's club with his signature on it. Even Carlos Hathcock didn't have a target up on that wall. Ron wondered why Carlos didn't have a target on the wall, and Bear said Carlos had stopped shooting by then since his MS made it impossible for him to shoot long distances. Bear said one of the saddest days of his life was when the Delta instructor told him that Carlos had died. Ron misted up when he heard Bear relating the story, and he remembered the white feather Gunny had painted on his stock. Jake wouldn't know the significance of the symbol, and he didn't want to seem like he was bragging in front of Bear. He made a note to himself to show Jake the rifle later, and explain who Carlos Hathcock was, and give him the 2 books in his collection to read, Marine Sniper and One Shot, One Kill. If Jake wanted to have some heroes, Ron would prefer Jake select someone like Carlos instead of a basketball or football player, except for Patrick Tillman, who volunteered for the US Army and went to Afghanistan, where he died in combat. He left a huge Pro Football contract, a wife, and kids after 09/11 and volunteered for service in Afghanistan. Ron shook his head, and wondered if he could be so self-sacrificing. That would be like him leaving Nancy and the kids, and joining the Marines. Then he remembered he was almost in the Academy when Congress stupidly cut the military to pay for social programs, and basically did away with the Air Force. Ron hoped he would never run into his Congressman, because he was pretty sure he'd punch the idiot out, and spend at least a year in jail.

Ron rolled Jake's target up, and posted a new target on the board, then they all went back to shooting. Ron was working with Josh, Sarah, and David on the 300-yard line while Jake continued to practice. The three younger children were finally shooting groups now that they had a scope to clearly see the target. Ron thought about that for a minute. The scopes on the AR-15's were Simmons scopes, and at maximum they only had a 9x magnification. Even Ron's National Match only had a 10x scope on it. He wanted to check the internet, and check with Bear about getting some better scopes. The Simmons was better suited to the 10/22 on the 100-yard line than a Match AR-15 shooting at 300 yards. Ron walked over to Bear, and he agreed with Ron that they could get better scopes, since these scopes were bought by the case fairly cheaply for militia use, since Bear figured the average militia member wouldn't be shooting much outside of 300 yards anyway, and minute of Dirtbag accuracy was plenty accurate enough. Bear suggested Ron get a couple of Springfield Armory M -25 White Feather tactical rifles with the supplied scope and bipod for Jake and him, and he might want to get some Leupold Tactical scopes for the other 3 kids for their AR-15's. Ron told Bear he'd check the internet when he got back to the lodge this evening; then order them through Allakaket

Airlines' FFL, to see if he could get a discount price.

When they finished shooting Ron asked Bear if he could borrow his computer. Bear said there was one in the Conference Room with a high-speed satellite connection. Judging by the size of his dish, Ron guessed that Bear might be able to talk to Military Satellites. Bear got Ron logged in, then they surfed the internet. Ron located the Springfield Armory site, and then saw the M - 25 Tactical Rifle (White Feather) and decided then and there he wanted to buy one. It would make a good rifle for Jake as well, so he decided to order 2 with the scope they were showing. Checking further on the webpage, he found out that the M -25 could take a whole line of scopes that were made for the Springfield Armory M -1 rifles. He liked the 6-20x50 Mil-Dot BDC Government Model scope best, even though it listed at \$900 dollars, which about the same price as the Leupold Mark 4 he was originally looking at. He asked Bear what he'd do. Bear shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, and raised his hands "I don't have a clue. The Leupold has always been the gold standard, but with Barrett going to Swarovski, Leupold has became just another high-priced top-quality scope line. I highly doubt that Springfield Armory would put a less than perfect scope on their M -25, especially since it has Carlos Hitchcock's endorsement and signature.

The extra magnification could come in handy during the day, but I highly doubt you'll be able to use all of it real early in the morning or late in the evening. At 20 power, that 50mm Objective means you have an exit pupil of 2.5mm which is OK during the bright light of day, but in the evening, it might not transmit enough light. Of course, your solution would be to dial down the zoom to about 15x to give you a 3mm exit pupil. They both were illuminated reticle tactical scopes with a mil-dot range estimating system. Ron had never used a mil-dot before, but figured Bear or someone could teach them how. The Springfield scope had a built-in Bullet-drop compensating elevation ring, with rings for .223 and .223, as well as a blank ring for another caliber. With the range-estimation and bullet-drop compensating system, the scope was designed for long-range shooting. He'd check with the shopkeeper, and have them price the scope through their distributor, and maybe buy 6 if they could get a good enough price. Jake's birthday was coming up, and Ron thought the M -25 with the scope and everything would make a killer birthday present. Between the rifle, scope, magazines, bipod, and case, it would be almost \$6 thousand. It wasn't like he couldn't afford it, but that was way more than he ever got for a birthday. If Jake kept shooting the way he was, he'd be able to take full advantage of the rifle and scope by his birthday.

For now the rest of the kids could shoot their Simmons scopes. He wasn't going to chance them breaking a \$900 dollar scope until they were a lot more mature and careful with the equipment. Ron told Bear his plans, and he agreed they should wait to get the younger kids better scopes, since they weren't shooting to the limits of the Simmons scopes yet. Remembering he promised Jake to take him shooting, he called Gene at home, and asked him to call the CO of Elmendorf, and get permission for Ron and Jake to shoot there tomorrow. Gene called back, and said it was OK with the CO, but they had a new Gunny, since the old Gunny retired several years ago, and moved to Alabama. Ron thought "Great, now I have to break in a new one."

Ron told Jake they could fly to Elmendorf tomorrow and go shooting. Ron called Allakaket and asked to have a 007 at their lodge by 0800 tomorrow, and to plan a round-trip to Elmendorf. Ron remembered he had plenty of Lake City BMG .50 Match ammo since he hadn't been shooting in a while. When they finished, and got ready to go home, Ron told them to roll up their best target and date it, so they could keep track of how they were shooting. Ron helped the younger 3, writing the size of their best group, the range, the date, and their name. Jake had already "autographed" his target with 3" @ 600 yds, today's date, and his first name, since Josh had the same first initial. Ron helped them load up and get buckled into the seats of 007 for the ride back to the lodge. Nancy had dinner ready, and told everyone to wash up. Ron showed Nancy Jake's target, and told her they were going shooting at Elmendorf tomorrow, and asked her if she'd mind taking the other 3 up to Bear's place shooting so they didn't feel too left out. Nancy didn't really like shooting the Barretts, even with the suppressor, the recoil was too much for her, and 5 rounds was about all she could take without a bruised shoulder. Ron remembered that, and asked her if Jake could borrow her shooting jacket, it would be a little big on him, but the shoulder should line up OK. Nancy said OK, she didn't want Jake coming home all black and blue. Ron was glad Jake and Josh had developed some table manners, and Sarah had developed a healthy appetite. Dinner went much more smoothly, and Ron said grace. After dinner, the 4 kids laid with Moose on the bearskin rug in front of the fire. Ron saw that Moose was getting really old, and knew he'd have to tell Jake that he was about to lose his best friend. Ron remembered how he felt when he lost Sam, and wished he could protect Jake from the heartbreak, but knew he could no more protect him from heartbreak than his dad could. Ron called Jake over, and sat down with him in his room.

"I don't know how to tell you this, but you need to prepare yourself for Moose's death. He's growing old, and won't live much longer. It's going to hurt, I know because I've buried 2 dogs so far, and vaguely remember Oliver. It hurts each time, but when you get a new dog, some of the hurt goes away."

"I don't want Moose to die!"

"Son, you don't have any choice. Dogs live much shorter lives than we do. I guess it's because we're put on this planet to learn how to love like God does, and dogs don't have as much to learn, since they are the most loving animals God created. Someone once said that when God created dogs, he made them to reflect his love, so he gave them a name that reflected his name, that's why Dog is God spelled backwards." Ron held his son while they cried. Ron put his hands on Jake's shoulders as they prayed together. "Lord, if you're ready to take Moose to you, please make his death painless, and give us the strength to bear the loss. And if it's your will, please provide another dog we can love as much as we love Moose. Amen" Jake echoed his Dad's Amen, then once they had dried their tears. Ron told Jake not to discuss this with his younger siblings, since they weren't old enough to understand anyway, and it would just upset them. As the Older Brother, Jake was very protective of his younger brothers and sister, when he wasn't teasing and tormenting them. He promised his Dad that he wouldn't mention it.

The next morning after Breakfast, Ron gathered his pelican case, and an ammo can full of BMG .50 Match ammo, and another soft case with their hearing and eye protection, and Jake's shooting jacket. Right at 0800, he heard the roar of a helicopter landing in the front yard. Jake kissed his mom goodbye, then helped his dad carry the stuff out to the helicopter. Jake was an old hand at boarding copters, and didn't need to be told to duck. Once their stuff was loaded, the crew chief made sure they were buckled in, then took his seat, buckled in, then tapped the pilot on the shoulder. He quickly lifted off and headed for Elmendorf. 2 hours later, they landed at the base, next to the shooting range. Ron and Jake got out while the rotor was still turning, and unloaded the chopper. Once they were clear, the pilot increased throttle and took off again. Once the dust settled, a different Gunnery Sergeant got out of his Hummer, walked over to Ron, and shook his hand. "You must be Ron Williams! Gunny Clark told me all about you before he retired. My Name is Gunnery Sergeant Simpson, but if you want you can just call me Gunny like everyone else. I take it this is Jake, nice to meet you." Jake shook the outstretched hand, and then Gunny told them the range already had targets set up, 2 at the 600-yard line, and 2 at the 1000-yard line, and their shooting positions were already set up with a pad and a tarp. Ron thanked Gunny, who picked up the ammo box and escorted them to the shooting line. The set up on the 600-yard line first, and Ron passed out eyes and ears before setting up. He set the Pelican case on the table and Gunny Simpson's eyes bugged out at the huge rifle. Jake thought the National Match was big until he saw this rifle out of its case, it was easily twice the size of Ron's National Match M-1a. Ron showed them the features of the rifle, and explained how it worked, and why they needed hearing protection even though the gun was suppressed. With the briefing complete, Ron took the rifle out of it's case, ejected the magazine, and loaded 5 rounds of BMG .50 Match ammo into the mag, and carried everything to his shooting position. Gunny set up 2 60x120mm spotting scopes so they could watch from the tables while Ron set up on the 600-yard line. He knew this was just a chip-shot for the gun, but didn't want Jake to get discouraged his first time out, so decided to start on the shorter range.

Once Ron was set up, he looked back at the Gunny, who gave him a "thumbs up" then Ron returned to the scope. 5 minutes later, he had 5 rounds in the x-ring, and he was pretty sure the bullet holes were touching each other. Jake couldn't believe his eyes, his dad just shot a group smaller than 2 inches without practicing. Ron stood up, and motioned for Jake to join him at the gun. Ron was pretty sure Jake's feet never touched the ground from the bench to the rifle. Ron got Jake prone behind the rifle, and helped him adjust the rifle to fit him, then loaded a magazine with 5 rounds. Jake looked through the scope, and the target looked huge, like it was staring him right in the face 5 yards away. He asked his dad why the image of the target was so huge, and Ron explained that the scope was designed to shoot man-sized targets at over a mile, and as a result, had a huge magnification factor. He got back behind the scope, and noticed it wasn't hardly moving at all, then realized the bipod and monopod totally supported the rifle like a machine rest, and all he had to do was shoot. Ron handed him the magazine, and after inserting the magazine, Jake cycled the action, but left the safety on until the last minute. Ron took his position back at the spotting scope, and Jake looked back, then the Gunny gave him a thumbs up. Jake released the safety, and took a firing grip on the gun. He started reciting the

23rd Psalm, and halfway through, was startled when the gun went off. He looked through the scope, and his first round was right through the x-ring. He settled down, and soon put the other 4 rounds in the x-ring. Ron was amazed, and grateful that Jake had his gift for shooting long-distance, and said a quick prayer of thanksgiving. Jake locked the action open just like his Dad taught him, and reset the safety, then stood up. Gunny sent a runner down to retrieve their targets, and when he came back, Ron had shot a 1.5 inch group, and Jake's was right at 2 inches.

Ron asked Jake if he was ready to move to the 1,000 yard line. Since the gun was already set up for Jake, Ron told him to go first. They carried the rifle over to the other shooting lane, set everything up, and Jake got behind the gun. Now when he looked through the scope the target wasn't so close, more like it was 10 yards away, but he could still see the x-ring clearly, and the gun barely moved. Once he was ready, Ron handed him a loaded magazine, and retreated back to the tables to watch through the spotting scope. Jake looked back, got a thumbs-up from the Gunny, loaded the gun, cycled the action and got ready to shoot. Once everything was where he wanted it, he released the safety, and started reciting the 23rd Psalm again. The first shot startled him, and he was completely surprised to find a bullet hole right in the center of the x-ring at 1000 yards! He steadied back up, and fired the 4 remaining rounds in the magazine, then locked the bolt back and set the safety. As soon as he stood up, Ron ran forward and lifted his son high in the air. "You did it! That group has got to be smaller than 6 inches, and the best group I've ever shot out of this rifle was around 4-5 inches, and I've shot thousands of rounds out of this rifle! I'm so proud of you!" Gunny sent a runner down, and retrieved the target. Once they measured the group and deducted the size of the bullet, Jake had shot a 5.95" group at 1000 yards.

Gunny Simpson realized that Gunny Clark wasn't just telling tall tales, Ron and his kid were definitely in the top 1% of long-distance shooters world-wide. Ron took his turn behind the rifle, and once Gunny made sure the range was clear, he fired 5 shots within 5 minutes, and Gunny was going out of his tree, all 5 rounds were inside the 5-inch X-ring at 1000 yards. He guessed Ron had just shot a 4-5 inch group at 1,000 yards. Once Ron locked the bolt open, set the safety, and stood up, Gunny sent a runner to retrieve the target. Sure enough, Ron had shot a 4.5" group at 1,000 yards. Ron and Jake took turns shooting the rest of the afternoon, finally they let Gunny try it. Ron coached the gunny through the set-up and body position, and he was amazed at how steady the image in the scope was, and the crosshairs seemed to be locked on the x-ring. He loaded the rifle, cycled the action, then cleared the safety. 5 rounds later, he realized he had just shot a 7-8 inch group. He stood up shaking his head. He realized this rifle was way beyond a tack-driver, it behaved like a laser. Since he was a Gunnery Sergeant, he knew a lot about guns and ammunition, and realized that the people at Barretts had written a new chapter in accuracy. The combination of the precision Barrett's platform, and the suppressor design combined to make a gun that could easily shoot sub-moa groups all day long. He'd heard rumors of a new super gun for the Bradley and the LAV. If it were half as accurate as this rifle, the rest of the world had better look out!

Finally when they were finished shooting, Ron called Allakaket and asked them to send the 007 to Elmendorf to pick them up. When it arrived an hour later, Ron guessed that it must have already been in the air to Elmendorf when they called. Gunny helped them load the rifle and what was left of their match ammo into the helicopter, and once they were seated and secured, it took off for the lodge.

When they got home, Ron could tell something was wrong by the look on Nancy's face. She held Ron and said "Moose died while you were gone. We found his body out back, over by the graveyard. I think he knew it was his time." Ron turned and crouched down to Jake's level. "Son, I've got some bad news, Moose died while we were gone. Mom found him laying on the graveyard like he knew his time was done. Why don't we put everything up and then let's bury him next to everyone else." Jake teared up, but Ron was surprised he didn't cry. "Dad, I've been expecting this ever since you told me. Now that he's gone, it's kind of a relief. I'll miss him, but I'm OK since I know he's in Heaven waiting for us." Once everything was put up, Ron got 2 shovels, and they dug a hole next to Sam and Lucky for Moose. Jake rolled Moose's body up in a caribou skin, and said "See you later Moose" then carefully lowered the body into the grave. Ron knelt next to his son, and they just stayed there for a while. Finally Jake said, "Let's get him buried. Moose isn't there anyway, he's in heaven, this is just what's left here." Father and son quickly filled in the grave, then Jake took one last look at his friend's grave, then went into the house.

Meanwhile, at Camp Pendleton, CA a very incredulous Marine General couldn't believe the specs that he was reading about the new LAV- 25 Mark II. The range of the gun had to be a misprint. The spec sheet claimed it could take out anything less than an M -1 Abrams at 5 miles with the outriggers down. "NO @#\$@# Way" he yelled. He got on the phone, and the CO of 29 Palms told him to fly on up there, they were putting the Mark II through its paces. He got off the phone, and found out an FA-18 2-seater was available, and asked the ops officer to make it ready for flight to 29 Palms, he'd be there in 20 minutes. He picked up his flight bag and his helmet, and drove to the flight line. He got into his G-suit, and climbed aboard. The pilot started the engines as soon as the crew chief gave him a thumbs-up, indicating everything was OK. He lowered the canopy and taxied to the runway. He figured the general must be in a hurry, since a VC-11A was available as well. He received immediate clearance, and pushed the throttles to zone 5 afterburner. Once he was airborne, he shut down the afterburners, and proceeded at full military thrust to 29 Palms. Half an hour later, he was on the ground, and was met by a Hummer with General's stars. Once the General climbed out, and took off his helmet, his Friend General Pittman said "You must really have been in a hurry to detail a FA-18 to fly here."

"Sam, I just want to see the damn Robo-tank in action - let's go!" They got aboard the Hummer and drove out to the gunnery range. The LAV-25-II was hull down in a revetment with its outriggers deployed. General Pittman handed General Stevens a set of hearing protectors, and they took their seats in the bleachers. Once they were seated, the Gunny running the range activated the range, and the gun on the LAV started belching rounds and swiveling left and

right. General Stevens was glad he brought his binoculars, because the Robo-tank was engaging targets over a mile away, and scoring 1st round kills. At the end of the demonstration, the whine of the engine died down, and 2 soldier crawled out of the hatches, then stood at attention in front of the Generals. The test engineer came running up, skidded to a stop, and saluted when he saw the 2 generals. General Stevens said "Let me see that!" and the engineer handed him the score sheet. It had the target number, the range to target and the score on a scale of 1-10 where 10 was a kill. Looking down the spreadsheet, he didn't see a score lower than a 9, and the range was from 1-5 miles. They had a perfect score of 30-30 and an engagement time of 5 minutes. General Stevens shook his head, evidently they weren't exaggerating, since he had just seen it with his own eyes.

Later, in the CO's office, General Stevens said "George, I still don't believe it. If we had this gun in WWII, the Jerries would have been wiped out, and we could have spared thousands of Marine lives. I don't know if we're going to get into any more tank wars, but if we do, this Mark II will absolutely destroy an armored division. When I was reading the classified spec sheet, it listed the PK for an Abrams at 50% and a Bradley or equivalent at over 80% with any range inside 5 miles with the outriggers down. I know the Abrams is a tough kill, so how did they get the 50% PK rating?"

"Larry, as near as I can tell, they said that with the precision firepower of the new Mark II, they could disable an Abrams with 1 shot, rendering it combat ineffective. While it's not a hard kill, a tank is out of action if it can't fight, even if the crew's alive. My guess is they rated a tank rendered CI as being 50% of a kill, since the crew wasn't effected. Personally, I wouldn't want to be an enemy tanker anywhere near the new Bradley or the LAV. The only other foreign tanks that stand a chance are the Leopard and the Challenger. All the others would probably not do much better than the Bradley's - maybe a 70% PK due to their heavier armor than the Bradley. Of course, any truck or APC less armored than the Bradley would be a 100% PK out to 5 miles. Not only that, but in Sniper mode, the Mark II could kill an enemy general with 1 shot out to 5 miles, even if he's moving!"

"Holy Shit George, I'm glad they're on our side! So who do we have to thank for this?"

"Gene Shepard, who just retired as the JSOC was running the program, but I was told it was an offshoot from research that Barretts was doing to improve the Barretts Light 50. I heard they produced a man-portable rifle that's fully suppressed and capable of a 5-inch group at 1,000 yards off a bipod and monopod. Some kid was testing them for Barretts at MacDill."

"George, see if you can get hold of Gene for me - I'd like to thank him personally!"

"He's retired now and living in Alaska. I'll call him, and see if I can make arrangements." Larry shook his friend's hand, then got a ride back to the flight line, where the FA-18 was waiting for him, fueled and ready to go. He got back into his flight gear, and climbed aboard. Meanwhile, George took out his shoe phone and called a number from the directory.

"Gene, this is George. Yeah, long time no see - anyway, General Stevens just saw the LAV-25 Mark II in action here, and wanted to thank you personally. Yeah, I'm sure he wouldn't mind flying to Elmendorf. OK, I'll let you know when he's going to be available. Thanks, talk to you later. Right, bye!"

General George Pitman sent an e-mail to General Stevens telling him that General Gene Shepard would love to meet him at Elmendorf whenever he wanted to.

Gene had a bright idea, and called up Ron. "Ron, General Stevens of the USMC wants to meet us and thank us for a job well done on the LAV-25 Mk II. I don't know when, but he will fly to Elmendorf, and we could meet him there. Great, I'll let you know - Right, Bye!"

Ron checked, and the Super Goose wasn't being used for the next couple of weeks, and Bear had just made the monthly Gold Run from the mine to the mint in Anchorage. If the general didn't wait too long, he'd be able to arrange it easily.

The next day, General Stevens checked his e-mail, then checked his schedule. All he had tomorrow was a dog and pony show for a junior condel. His junior officer could handle it easily, and called Flight Ops to tell them to have the VC-11A ready to go at 0800 tomorrow morning, and to file a flight plan for Elmendorf Alaska. Used to unusual requests from the general, the major didn't ask any questions, and said "Aye, Aye Sir!" and made sure the VC-11A would be ready to fly at 0800 tomorrow, and the flight plan got filed. General Stevens called George, and asked him to have Gene meet him tomorrow. George called Gene, and told him General Stevens would be in Elmendorf around 1400 tomorrow. Gene thanked George, and said that he'd be there, and he was going to bring someone with him that the General was sure he would want to meet, since he was the person responsible for testing the Barrett's prototypes, and he lived in Alaska. George trusted Gene's judgment, so he said "bring him along; I'm sure the general would approve."

Chapter 39 - Uncle Sam's Misguided Children

Gene called Ron and asked him to pick him up in the Super Goose and fly him to Elmendorf by 1400 tomorrow. Ron knew his flight time to Elmendorf was 1.5 hours, and it took the 007 an hour to get from Allakaket to the lodge, so he needed to be picked up at least 2.5 hours in advance if there were no delays, better make that 3 hours to be on the safe side, Ron called Allakaket and told BA he needed the 007 to pick him up and fly him back to Allakaket at 1100 the next morning. BA said he'd take care of it. Gene called back, and reminded Ron to bring his TS ID with him, and he might want to bring the suppressed Barrett's rifle and some ammo just in case. Not knowing what the ex-general had up his sleeve, Ron agreed. The next morning right at 1100, he heard the sound of the 007 coming in for a landing. Jake helped his dad load the chopper, and gave him a hug before he left. Ron wondered what was up; Jake usually wasn't the cuddly type, at least with him. They landed back in Allakaket at 1200, and Gene was waiting for him. They transferred the rifle case and ammo to the Super Goose, then Ron asked Gene to fly up front with him. The turbines were already idling when he got inside, so Ron called the tower and quickly preflighted the Super Goose while they taxied to the lake. Once they were waterborne, he taxied to the downwind end of the lake, and got permission to take off. Once he had permission, Ron turned the plane smartly into the wind using the rudders and pushed the twin throttles to the stops. Quickly they accelerated to 85 knots, and he pulled back on the yoke, and they quickly climbed to 2,000 feet while he turned toward Elmendorf. Once he was straight and level, he turned on the autopilot and asked Gene what the heck was going on.

"Sorry about the secrecy Ron. A friend of a friend of mine wanted to visit and thank you and me for the LAV-25 MK II. He's a 1-star Marine General from Camp Pendleton, CA. George told me he was really impressed with the new gun on the LAV, so I told George that I'd love to meet him. His name is General Stevens, and he should be arriving at Elmendorf at 1400 from California."

"Either he left early, or he's flying a fighter."

"If I remember correctly, neither. His personal VIP transport is a Gulfstream VC-11a. It's got a 3500 mile range, and flies around 588 mph."

"When I flew in your VC-20, we were lucky to be doing 500 knots, and it took forever."

"Yeah, but it's got almost twice the legs of the VC-11a. The VC-20H is a Gulfstream IV, and its range is over 4800 miles, but its cruise speed is only 450 knots and it carries 14 passengers plus 5 crew members."

"Ok, so he's got a small fast VIP jet, but can it land on water?"

“Not on purpose!”

They both got a good laugh at that. Ron called Elmendorf when he was $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour out, and since the General was with him - Ron wondered how they knew that - they directed him right in. When they landed, there was a small Gulfstream jet parked next to them. Ron guessed that was General Stevens, and figured out how the ATC knew that General Shepard was aboard. Ron shut down the engines, and Gene got out first to greet General Stevens. Gene wasn’t wearing his uniform, so instead of saluting, they shook hands. As Ron came out of the Super Goose, General Shepard introduced him to General Stevens. “General, this is Ron Williams. He’s the guy who did the testing for Barretts, and was directly responsible for the accuracy of the LAV-25 MK II gun.”

“General, I was just the test engineer. The designers are back at Barretts.”

“Ron Williams, where have I heard that name before?”

General Stevens remembered something his senior Recon Marine Shooting instructor told him about a 13-year old kid that could shoot the left eye of a gnat at 1000 yards. But that was almost 20 years ago. Larry looked carefully at Ron and realized that it could be him.

“Ron, did you do some shooting at MacDill about 10-20 years ago?”

Ron looked to Gene, who nodded; evidently it was OK to tell General Stevens.

“My Uncle Steve Fellows invited us to MacDill AFB after he saw me shoot a 2” group at 400 yards with my Browning A-Bolt in .308.”

“So you were the wunderkind who could shoot the left eye of a gnat at 1000 yards?”

“Not exactly General, but close. That was a joke that Gunny used to tell. My best group with the Barretts so far has been around 4 or 5 inches at 1,000 yards.”

General Stevens sputtered “4 or 5 inches - my snipers don’t shoot that good!”

Gene interrupted “General, it’s all true. Right up until those idiot congresscritters destroyed the Air Force, Ron was set to go to the Academy, shoot on our Rifle team, and hopefully fly the F-15 Strike Eagle. Now he owns Allakaket Airlines and that plane we arrived in is one of I believe 8 planes and 2 helicopters he owns.”

General Stevens took a closer look at Ron’s plane. It looked like a miniature C-130, but it was an Amphibian.

“Ron, what the heck kind of plane is that - it looks like a miniature C-130, but I know for a fact

that they didn't make any Amphibs.”

“General, that's a Super Goose. It's an evolution of the original Grumman WWII Goose. I replaced the original Wasp radials with a couple of old Allison test-bench turboprops, and installed them in 1950's RCAF Goose airframes. When I ran out of engines, I looked up Allison, and they were amazed that the engines I got were still flying. They offered to build me some new and improved motors if they could have the old ones back to test. Eventually the RCAF got wind of the Turbo Goose as I called it, and wanted some for SAR/SF applications, and they talked to Northrop Grumman, and they lengthened the original Goose airframe 6 feet, added a rear ramp, and a twin boom tail to clear the ramp. They also installed a more powerful set of Allison turboprops. Northrop Grumman built several hundred of the new airplane, and called it the Super Goose to differentiate it from the Turbo Goose.”

“I never heard of it, mind if I look inside?”

“Sure general, hang on a second while I deploy the ramp so you can see how much room it really has.”

Ron crawled into the cockpit, and lowered the tail ramp and unlocked the cabin doors. The general walked up the ramp, and was amazed that he could comfortably walk from the ramp up to the cockpit door, and he was almost 6 feet tall. Ron unlocked the cockpit door, and asked the General to take the right seat while he showed him the avionics suite. Larry saw all the cases bolted to the bulkheads and asked about them.

“General, the two on the inside of the cockpit contain my emergency ditch kits, and the two on the cabin side contain my Alaskan Paramedic kit, a first aid kit, and an oxygen delivery kit for when I'm flying Medevac.”

“This plane would make a great SAR/SF platform!”

“That's exactly what the RCAF thought. They bought 100 of them.”

“How fast does she go?”

“She can fly at over 300 knots for 500 miles in an emergency, or 280 knots for about 1200 miles, or 250 knots for around 1500 miles. She can climb at 2500 feet per second, and she's fully STOL capable. I've landed her at lakes that are smaller than the runway is wide, and taken off again. With the reversible props, it's like throwing an anchor out.”

“Can we take her for a spin?”

“Sure, there's a lake right around here that the hospital that bought 2 of these used for me to demonstrate the STOL characteristics of the plane. Gene, you want to come along?”

Gene climbed in, and they fastened the jump seat into its location right in front of the cockpit door right after Ron closed and locked all the doors. Once he started the turbines, he raised the rear ramp and secured it. General Stevens decided he wanted to ride in the jump seat where he could see everything. Ron warned him it wasn't the most comfortable seat, and Larry explained that he was a Mustang and had come up through the ranks, and this was a lot more comfortable than the seats in the back of a C-130 configured for paratroopers. Ron shrugged his shoulders and completed the preflight checklist, then got permission from Elmendorf for a demonstration flight, a max-performance take off, and aerobatic maneuvers. That last one shook Gene up, but figured Ron knew what he was doing. The tower gave him clearance for the demonstration flight, and he punched in the coordinates for the nearby lake. When he reached the end of the runway, he suggested that the generals hold onto their seats, pushed the throttles to max, and as soon as he could, hauled the yoke back into his lap, and maintained that rate of climb until he reached 2,000 feet. When he reached the lake, he performed a wing-over and caught his altitude right at 500 feet AGL, then cranked madly on the flaps while he slowed to 50 knots exactly. Gene saw the postage stamp ahead, and said "There's NO way you can land on that!"

"General, I land this baby at Help Me Jack practically every day - this is a walk in the park in comparison."

Right as they cleared the treeline, Ron pushed in the throttle, and they floated down to the lake like they were on a parachute. Right before touchdown, Ron pushed the nose forward, and as soon as they were down, he reversed the props and revved up to 30% power. They stopped just like they had thrown out an anchor. Both generals sat there speechless. Ron taxied to the end of the lake, and did another max performance take-off, and flew back to Elmendorf. He made a little more sedate landing, and parked right next to General Stevens' VC-11A. When they were both able to talk again. General Stevens said "That beat the pants off flying aerobatics in an FA-18! I thought for sure we were going to crash during that landing. You would have made one heck of a Naval Aviator Ron; you'd probably be able to catch a 3-wire in a typhoon in the dark!"

"General, if you want to, I brought the latest Barrett Light 50 with the suppressor with me, so we can shoot at Elmendorf's 1,000 yard range."

"Really, I'd like to try that - lead on McDuff!"

Ron called Gunny Simpson, who met them with his personal Hummer, and quickly put General Flags on it, then loaded the rifle and the ammo, and drove them back to the range. Ron set the rifle up, and asked General Simpson if he'd do the honors. Ron acted as a shooting coach, and once the General got settled and the rifle adjusted properly, the scope was stuck on the x-ring like the gun was permanently fixed. Gunny Simpson had already cleared the range, and he had a whole squad of runners this time, he didn't want to keep the generals waiting! Ron retreated to the spotting scope; the General loaded the gun, cleared the safety, and when the crosshairs were exactly in the center of the bullseye, barely squeezed the trigger. It wasn't as loud as he

expected, and through the scope he could clearly see his first round right in the middle of the X-ring. He'd shot a bullseye at 1,000 yards - he'd never done that before. As soon as he settled down, he shot 4 more rounds. His groups weren't as good as Ron's, but Ron wasn't 50 years old either. When the General stood up, the runner ran down to the target and back again.

Gunny measured his group, subtracted the bullet diameter, and came up with a 9.85 inch group! General Stevens was amazed. He had shot a sub-moa group with an unfamiliar gun at 1,000 yards. He usually shot for score on the 600 yard line at the most.

Ron asked General Shepard to go next. Realizing that this was a chance of a lifetime to shoot the prototype gun, Gene hurried to the gun. Ron acted as a shooting coach, got Gene set up behind the scope, and handed him a loaded magazine with 5 rounds of BMG 50 Match ammo. Ron quickly retreated to the spotting scope, and Gene cleared the safety, and as soon as the sights were centered on the center of the X-ring, he squeezed the trigger just as Ron told him. He too hit the bullseye, and proceeded to shoot off the other 4 rounds. Looking through his scope he could see he shot right around a 9-inch group. When he stood up, another runner was dispatched to get his target. Gunny measured his group, and after subtracting the bullet diameter, he had shot an 8.75-inch group. He was ready to dance a jig, but didn't want to rub it in too bad, since General Stevens was still active duty, and a Marine. Finally it was Ron's turn. He re-adjusted the stock to fit him, and once he got behind the scope, he blocked out everything but the image of the target in the scope. The next thing he knew, he'd fired all 5 rounds, and they were all in the X-ring! Gunny Simpson just shook his head. If Ron's kids could shoot half as good as he did, they could form their own National Shooting Team, and clean up on the International shooting circuit. Ron's target came back, and Gunny couldn't believe it. After subtracting the bullet diameter, he just shot a 3.98 inch group in front of 2 generals! Ron was amazed, he had never shot a sub-4" group before.

General Stevens was smiling, and asked Ron when his cape was coming back from the cleaners. Ron laughed, then General Stevens asked him if he wanted to work as a Shooting Instructor for the Marines. He wouldn't have to enlist, he would be a paid civilian instructor. Gene looked at General Stevens funny - he'd never heard of that before! Larry explained that the USMC was going to implement the new Barrett's suppressed rifle as their new Sniper rifle, and since Ron was the most experienced shooter he knew with the system, the Marine Corps wanted to hire him to teach the instructors on the finer points of shooting the rifle, including using both scopes. Ron said he wasn't qualified.

"Son, I make the determination as to who is qualified. You just shot a 4-inch group at 1,000 yards in front of 2 generals. That's pressure! Gene told me you were the original test engineer for the Barretts system when you were only 13 or 14. You've got over 10 years experience with this rifle, and the Marine Corps needs your experience. I could draft you, but I think you'd be happier as a paid consultant."

Gene spoke up "Ron, he does have the authority to draft you, so you're going either way - if I were you, I'd make it as a Civilian Contractor, the pay's much better!"

"Ok, General, you win. Let me know when and where, and I'd appreciate as much of a heads-up as possible. Any idea how long this will take?"

"If I can get everyone together at once, maybe just a couple of weeks."

"Ok, General, I can handle that. Thanks, it will be an honor and a privilege."

"Now about that plane. I want to talk to some of my friends in the Pentagon about buying some. Gene, who replaced you as JSOC - I need to get him on board about this too!"

"Larry, he's a 2-star by the name of Piper. Sam Piper if I remember correctly."

"Thanks Gene. I need to be heading back. Thanks for an interesting and very informative day, both of you! Ron, you'll hear from me soon. How do I get hold of you?"

Ron apologized and handed the general his Allakaket Airlines business card. General Stevens thanked him, and got aboard his VC-11a and flew back to California. Once they were back aboard the Super Goose, Ron said "Thanks a lot Gene, I thought I was out of the Consultant Business!"

"Grow up Ron, you have skills the military desperately needs. The average Marine Marksmanship qualifying scores over the last 20 years have been falling steadily, mostly due to the lack of shooting instruction outside of the military. It used to be every kid that lived outside the city was a crack shot, now they're more worried about playing soccer than shooting squirrels. You are probably among the top 1% of long-distance shooters world-wide. I can imagine as the Army and Special Forces adopt the new rifle, you'll be busy teaching their instructors. Military contracting is lucrative. You could earn several hundred thousand dollars for a couple of weeks work."

"What about my kids - Jake and Josh are at the age where they really need their dad home."

"Like I said, you'll only be gone a week or so, and once you're done training the trainers, you're done!"

"Ok Gene, if you say so."

"Remember a couple of years ago, I told you that you're doing the United States more good as a shooter than you ever could as a pilot. This is just an extension of that."

Ron and Gene flew home, and Ron dropped Gene off at Allakaket and had the 007 fly him back up to the lodge. When he got home, he was mugged by 4 kids. He missed Moose's greetings, and realized he needed to do something about it. Once he had a minute to himself, he called Bill and BA and asked if anyone in town had puppies for sale or free, they needed to replace

Moose, since he died. BA was very sad, since his kids played with Moose often enough that they knew him. They recently got their own dog, a Husky called Sitka. BA said he'd check around and get back to him.

Chapter 40 - Fallout

Ron was reading the online newspaper when he saw an article on the AP news wire, and he called Gene.

“Gene, Ron Williams. Can you find out something for me. Log onto the internet, and check the AP news listings. See the article about the shake-up at Northrop Grumman. OK, can you find out if that involved you-know-who and you-know-what. Great, thanks.”

Two hours later, Gene was knocking on his door. Ron opened the door and Gene said, “come outside for a minute, we need to talk.”

Once they were out in the driveway away from everyone, Gene said “OK, I got hold of my buddy at FBI counterintelligence, and it’s as you guessed. Jack Snyder is going to be indicted for multiple counts of Espionage. Here’s the kicker. It won’t be in open court due to the National Security issues. They caught him red-handed with one of the data recorders they had tagged. One of our VC-20’s was sent in for maintenance, and the digital recorder was removed, and we traced it as it was passed from person to person. It finally wound up in Jack Snyder’s possession, we ID’d the Aircraft mechanic that installed the recorder from his fingerprint, and he was persuaded to turn state’s evidence.” Ron wondered how they got the guy to turn state’s evidence. He guessed the thought of spending the rest of his life at Leavenworth with a 300lb black guy as a cellmate might have had something to do with it!

Ron was reading the Internet 2 weeks later when he read about a mysterious car crash in Los Angeles. It seemed a high-profile defense attorney was driving his client to a pre-trial hearing when the brakes failed on their limousine right as it entered a busy intersection. The limo was hit by an 18-wheeler tractor trailer that was running at full speed. The limo was destroyed on impact, and there were no survivors. One of the victims was listed as Jack Snyder. Ron wondered if someone had decided that Jack should never stand trial, and took him out. He decided that it would be better if he didn’t know for sure, and never asked Gene about it.

Since it was getting cold, Ron decided that now would be a good time to pack up the family and move back to their house in Allakaket. He contacted BA, who said he would set everything up for tomorrow, and he had a line on someone with Husky puppies for sale. Ron said that they could go see them tomorrow or the next day, and to e-mail him the details. They spent the rest of the day packing up their stuff to move back to Allakaket. The next morning after breakfast they heard the distinctive noise of the 007 coming in for a landing. Before it could land, the Super Goose taxied up to the doorway, and lowered its ramp. They quickly loaded everything inside the Super Goose, and Ron walked forward, and gave Steve a thumbs up, and he lifted the rear ramp, and turned to taxi to the lake. Once he was clear the 007 landed to pick them up. The pilot apologized for the mix-up, and Ron told him never mind, BA was just a little too precise in arranging their take-off times so they could land within a couple of minutes of each

other. Once the kids were secured, Ron belted himself in, and the crew chief double checked their harnesses, then sat down in his seat, secured himself, and tapped the pilot on his shoulder. He grabbed pitch, and the chopper rose smoothly into the air, then pivoted and flew to Allakaket. It landed at the airport on 1 of 2 helipads that they had built for the 007's. They walked to their truck, and Ron was surprised to find the bed of the truck already loaded. He called BA, and asked him to find out who was making his life so easy, and give him a raise or a bonus, and Ron's thanks. BA said the couple that was selling their puppies were home, and suggested they get over there today. Ron turned to Jake and asked him if he'd like a new puppy. Jake's smile told him everything he needed to know, and Ron got the address from BA. They drove over there and got out of the truck. Ron knocked on the door, only to be swarmed by a half-dozen puppies. He turned to Jake and said "Pick one Son!" Jake picked one up, only to have one of the puppies whine. When Josh picked up the other one, they both settled right down. The wife explained that those two had been inseparable from birth. Ron said "Well we can't break up a set!" He turned to Jake, who was vigorously nodding his head. He looked at Nancy, who gave him the look "Ok if you really have to!" Ron asked the lady how much for both of them. She said "They're free - I just wanted to give them to good homes, and not break those two up. I only said I was selling them to discourage people who weren't serious dog owners."

"Thanks, Moose just died last week, and another dog or two would be perfect."

"Ok, but they're barely weaned, and definitely not paper trained."

"What have you been feeding them?"

"The vet said they should be on puppy chow for another couple of weeks, then regular dog food, but you might want to moisten it for them until their teeth grow in."

"Have they had their shots?"

"They've been wormed and given their puppy shots. We haven't spayed the females or neutered the males yet."

Nancy was a Veterinary Assistant, and was looking over the pups carefully, feeling the hips, and checking the dogs over carefully. "No signs of hip dysplasia or other major genetic defect. You either are a very careful breeder, or got very lucky."

"The Mom's an AKC Husky, but the father was a sled dog, so there shouldn't be any inbreeding problems. This will probably be her last litter, since we're going to have her fixed after we give away the rest of her pups, but we might keep one of them if my daughter has her way."

Ron shook her hand, and thanked her, then they turned to go. Jake held one pup, and Josh held the other. They sat next to each other on the way home. Ron stopped at the General Store on

the way home, and picked up a 35-pound bag of puppy chow, and four dog bowls. He swiped his debit card through the reader instead of writing a check, and was back in the truck 10 minutes later. When they got home, Jake and Josh set the puppies down, and as soon as they smelled Moose's scent, they peed right where Moose did. When they finished, Jake and Josh picked up their puppies and praised them then carried them inside. When they got inside and unloaded Ron asked them what they were going to call them. The re-make of Starsky and Hutch just came out on DVD, so Jake suggested calling them Starsky and Hutch. Ron laughed since he remembered seeing the original show on TV once. He thought that was OK, so he told them to put Starsky and Hutch on the bearskin rug, and clean up for supper. The two puppies sacked out, and Nancy made dinner while Ron put stuff up. After dinner, Ron sat his two oldest sons down and said, "Those dogs are your responsibility. You alone are responsible for feeding, training, and cleaning up after them. Don't let me down." Ron showed them where the puppy chow was, and how much to give the puppies and how often. He told them the dog's water needed to be changed twice a day, or more frequently if they drank it all. He told them not to feed them anything but puppy chow and water, because they couldn't digest people food too well, since they were still very young. Jake left Josh to play with the puppies and asked his dad how long those two might live. "If nothing happens to them, they'll probably live 10-15 years."

Jake did some quick mental arithmetic and said "Good, because I wouldn't want Josh, Sarah or David to experience losing a friend while they're still kids." Ron held his son, then he ran back to check on the puppies. They were still asleep, so Ron suggested they get ready for bed too. Jake complained it was too early, and Ron gave him the look, and he said "Ok Dad, I'm going." Ron stopped Jake and asked him how school was doing. Jake said it was going OK, but he was having some trouble with his multiplication tables. Ron could remember what a hassle they were, and told Jake he could do it, all he needed to do was memorize them, like his Bible verses. Jake smiled when he realized that was all he needed to do. He hugged his dad and said goodnight. Ron walked into the master bedroom, and Nancy was waiting for him "I hope you know what you're doing."

"I talked to Jake and Josh, and put the puppies totally in their care. I told them not to disappoint me. I don't think we'll have any problems."

"If you say so dear. I already took a shower, so hurry up and take a shower and let's go to bed." Ron kissed Nancy, got undressed, took a quick shower, and went to bed.

Meanwhile General Larry Stevens, USMC had been busy. He contacted a whole gaggle of generals including USMC, Army, and Special Forces, including LtGen. Sam Piper, JSOC, and got them all on board about the new Barrett's rifle, and possibly buying a bunch of the Super Goose for SAR and SF use. It turned out the new Super Goose could be a perfect inter-coastal SAR platform, and could carry a SF Team or a squad of Recon Marines on short-range interdiction missions near bodies of water or short rough runways. They kicked their ideas up to the office of the Joint Chiefs, and General Michael Hagee, the Commandant of the USMC.

He sent an E-mail to Ronnie Barrett at Barrett Arms, and carbon copied Ron Williams at Allakaket Airlines, and Gen. Gene Shepard in Allakaket.

It read:

Gentlemen:

The USMC will be the first service to field the new Barretts M -200. We request the following people at MCBH Kaneohe Bay on 01Nov04 at 0900. Travel expenses will be reimbursed by the USMC/DOD and consulting contract rates will be paid for this project, not to exceed 2 weeks.

Roy Hunter, Barrett Arms, Designer

Chief Stuart Smith, USMC(ret) Barrett Arms, Assembly Technician/Armorer

Lance Miller, Barrett Arms, Tech Rep

Ron Williams, Allakaket Airlines, Chief Consultant

Gen. Gene Shepard, USAF (ret), Consultant

Ron called Gene "Guess we're going to Hawaii?"

"I wonder why they added my name to the consultant list, I don't know bupkiss about the rifle."

"My guess would be your name is all over the documentation as the Officer In Charge."

"Right - I forgot about that. At least I'll get a nice Hawaiian vacation out of this!"

Gene remembered as an honorably retired General, he could wear his uniform, but he would travel as a civilian unless they flew a MAC flight from Elmendorf to Kaneohe Bay, since they had a Marine Air Station there, with a long runway. He told Ron he'd call him back that afternoon, he had to check something. Gene e-mailed a copy of Commandant Hagee's letter to the CO at Elmendorf, and asked him if they could use a VC-11a to fly from Elmendorf to MCB Kaneohe Bay instead of booking 2 first-class round trip tickets from Anchorage International to Honolulu. When he got a look at the Commandant's letter, he immediately authorized the use of the VC-11a, and suggested Gene travel in uniform to avoid any questions. Gene replied that Ron needed to transport his rifle and ammunition aboard Air Force aircraft for the purpose of this project, plus they would both be armed with Federal CCW permits. The CO told Gene he would make all the arrangements, and to be at Elmendorf Saturday 30Oct04 at 1200.

Gene sent a copy of the General's reply to Ron, then called him. He said that they would have a 007 fly them to Elmendorf from Allakaket at 1000 on 30Oct04, to arrive at Elmendorf at 1200.

Ron arrived at the Allakaket heliport at 0945 to give the crew chief time to load the aircraft.

Gene arrived 5 minutes later in uniform, carrying a duffle bag and a garment bag. The crew chief saluted Gene since they were both in uniform and outdoors. Gene returned the salute smartly. He missed some things in the military, and was grateful he could still wear his uniform. They climbed into the helicopter, the crew chief checked that they were secured, then they lifted off right at 1000 and arrived at Elmendorf at 1200. The 007 landed right next to the VC-11a, and the crew chief saluted Gene again as he boarded the VC-11. They quickly transferred their baggage, and the VC-11 was backed away from the parking stall, and taxied to the active runway. Gene and Ron sat next to each other, and Ron took out his CD player and 2 headsets with an adapter, and asked Gene if he wanted to listen to something while they flew. Gene took the headset, and Ron pushed play on the CD player, and they leaned back to listen to a Bach Concerto. 5 hours later, they arrived at Kaneohe Bay, where a USMC Staff Sergeant met them at the foot of the air stairs, saluted General Shepard, and escorted them to the Humvee while a couple of privates loaded their baggage in the back of the Hummer. He introduced himself as Staff Sergeant Wilson, Headquarters. He was to deliver them to the VIP quarters, and then would pick them up at 0830 tomorrow and deliver them to the secure conference room.

They checked into the VIP quarters, and were assigned adjoining rooms. The sergeant manning the desk told them Ronnie Barrett had already checked in, and his group was in the cafeteria. Gene and Ron quickly stowed their bags in their rooms and hurried to the cafeteria. Once they got their food, and walked over to their table Ron stood up since Gene was still in uniform. “What do I owe this privilege to General?”

“Mr. Barrett, you might not know me or my guest, but I was the OIC for the M -200 project.”

“General Shepard, I finally get to meet you. I’m guessing, but you must be Ron Williams - I’ve always wanted to meet you sir!”

Ron set his tray down quickly, and shook Ronnie Barrett’s hand. “The pleasure is all mine sir - I can definitely say that you now make the most accurate rifles in the world!”

“Can I quote you on that?”

They all started laughing, then General Shepard asked “May we join you?”

“By all means General, Ron - please join us, we were just talking about the project.”

For the next several hours they were talking shop, Ron and Ronnie found out they were very much alike during the time. Ronnie said he loved hunting, but rarely got the time. Ron invited him and his wife to their lodge next hunting season, and they could go caribou hunting on his land. All they’d need was their rifles and an Alaskan Non-resident hunting license, and a caribou tag. He could send a plane or helicopter to Anchorage to fly them in.

Ronnie said “I’ll have to take you up on that!”

Larry the Tech Rep asked Ron “What’s your group size down to now?”

Gene replied “The last time he shot at Elmendorf with General Stevens and I, he shot a 4.5” group at 1,000 yards, and both of us shot sub-moa groups and we never fired the rifle before.”

That comment started a whole new line of questions. If two middle-aged Generals could shoot sub-moa groups, they wanted to find out why. Gene said part of it was the rifle, and part of it was Ron’s coaching. He told them how he acted as a shooting coach to both generals, and got them comfortably behind the rifle, with their right eye in the sweet spot behind the scope. He showed them how to adjust the stock to fit them, how to set up the bipod and monopod so the scope was locked on the bullseye, and all they had to do was pull the trigger. Gene told Ronnie that he was amazed at the trigger, it was light and crisp, and broke like the proverbial glass rod. Larry had his tape recorder running, recording all these comments for later, so he could play them back to the design group. “Ronnie, I don’t know how you did it, but you guys designed the perfect sniper rifle, and the Swarovski scope is just awesome!”

“Ron, you’ve shot the night sight, what did you think of it?”

“I’ve never shot a night scope before the first trial with the prototype. The Gunny at MacDill was extremely helpful setting up the scope for me and explaining how it worked. I was really impressed. Except for the green tint, it basically turned night into day. I could see the target clearly in my sights, and the lighted chevron aiming point was a nice touch. Once the engineers worked out the QD problem, I’d say it was basically a perfect night scope, but I haven’t shot any others to compare it to.”

Finally it was getting late, so General Shepard said they could continue this conversation at 0800 tomorrow at breakfast. They shook hands around the table and said goodnight. Ron and Gene went to their rooms, took showers, and went to bed. They got up at 0730, got dressed, and met Ronnie Barrett and his team in the buffet line for breakfast. Once they were all seated, Ron started saying grace, and was pleased to hear 5 “Amens”.

“I didn’t know you guys were Christians?”

Ronnie said, “Guess it never came up! Thanks for saying Grace, sometimes I forget!”

The conversation quickly switched back to the upcoming demonstration and instruction on the Barretts M -200 as the Pentagon was calling it. Ron had brought both rifles, both scopes, and enough BMG-50 Match ammo to last 2 weeks. Ronnie Barrett brought another case with them from Murfreesboro, TN just in case they ran out. They all traveled in the corporate jet, a new Gulfstream V. Since it was almost 4,000 miles to Honolulu, the extra unrefueled range of the V saved them at least an hour or two, and even at 459 knots, it was almost as fast as some commercial jets, besides, flying your own private jet bypassed all the TSA BS! Since he was a firearms manufacturer, flying demo weapons and ammo to various locations via commercial air

transport was a bigger headache than it was worth.

At 0855, a whole procession of hummers showed up at the VIP area. Ron showed the Marines which cases to carry, and felt sorry for the poor Marines that got detailed to carry the case of ammo Ronnie Barrett brought. They all met at 0900 at the secure conference facility. They were searched, and when the hand-held metal detectors went off on Ron and Gene, they showed the Federal CCWs, so the Marines let it slide. The sergeant in charge of Security highly suggested to the general that they leave the hardware at the VIP safe deposit for the duration of their stay on base. Gene figured with all those Marines around, they were right. Once they were seated, a Sergeant Major yelled "Attention on Deck" and Brigadier General George Trautman walked in, and said "As you were". When they continued to stand, he said "Gentlemen, please be seated so we can start." When they finally sat down, he said "Welcome to Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay. We're here for a training session by Barrett Firearms, and the Testing and Evaluation team. Gentlemen, Welcome." With that the General turned and marched out of the room.

The head of the Scout Sniper school stood up, and said "I'm Colonel Saunders, and any chicken jokes might get you court-martialed or flogged. I'm in charge of the Scout Sniper school, and in the front row are all the active Marine Scout Sniper Instructors, we're here to learn everything we can about this new weapons system, so you have our undivided attention. General Shepard why don't you lead off." Colonel Sanders shook Gene's hand, and handed him a note that read "Gene, just give them the background on the project from the perspective of the SF JSOC, thanks, Jim."

Gene pocketed the note and said "Gentlemen, Ronnie Barrett approached the Military with an idea for a new sniper rifle and a new scope. Since we already had the M-82A1, we were wondering how much better a new rifle could be, since the M82 was shooting MOA out to 1,000 yards. Still, Ronnie had surprised us before, so we agreed to test it. A couple of months into the T&E project, my aide and the CO of the Pave Hawks approached me with a request to bring his family on base for a week or two. When he told me his 13-yr old nephew was shooting a .5 moa group at 400 yards, I told him I wanted to see this with my own eyes. 2 weeks later, Ron Williams and his family arrived at Elmendorf. Just like Colonel Fellows said, his nephew shot a 2-inch group at 400 yards out of a stock Browning A-bolt in .308 with a BOSS unit and a synthetic stock. I asked Ron if he wanted to try the 600 yard line, and still he shot a .5 MOA group. Later that day I found out the Gunny had let Ron shoot the prototype, and had managed a group smaller than the snipers that were assigned to the T&E project. He taped Ron's impressions of the rifle, and a couple of suggestions he had. That got Ronnie Barretts thinking in different ways, and a year or so later, came up with the idea of a suppressed Barretts with a different stock and a superior scope from Swarovski. He told the engineers at Swarovski to pull out all the stops with this scope. We called Ron Williams back to MacDill to test the new prototype, and found out in the right hands, it made the previous Barretts rifles look like standard issue rifles. Ron's best group at 1,000 yards so far with this gun and the daylight scope was 4.5 inches in front of General Stevens and myself at Elmendorf AFB a couple of

months ago. That brings you current on the project.”

Gene answered a couple of questions, then took his seat.

Ronnie Barrett was next, and described the design process, and the nuts and bolts behind the design. Ron Williams was impressed at all the detail that went into designing this gun, no wonder it shot like a laser rifle, and cost over \$10,000 per copy plus the scope! Once he was finished, the Designer and the Tech rep went up with cut-away rifles, and a sample to show the Marine instructors how the rifles went together, and the field stripping procedures as well as the Armory maintenance procedures. Ron stuck his hand up, and Larry said “Yes, Ron?”

“I don’t know how to tell you this, but my rifle has never been through the Armory procedures, and I have almost 2,000 rounds through it!”

Larry got really excited, and asked Ron if they could disassemble his rifle in front of the group and mike it out. Ron reluctantly agreed. No long range shooter wants someone else messing with his rifle. Two sergeants picked up the case containing Ron’s new prototype, and when they opened the case, Larry was surprised the rifle was so clean. Ron said the rifle got cleaned regularly, but never stripped past the field strip recommendations. Larry was scratching his head, because the rifle should be gummed solid in all the nooks and crannies that needed cleaning during an Armory maintenance cycle. Larry called Chief Smith over to the table with his armorers tools, and they detail stripped the weapon, miked out all the parts, and found that there was virtually no wear on the components. Chief Smith couldn’t see any liquid lubricants on the rifle, and asked Ron what he used for lubricant. Ron said in Alaska, the only lubricant you can use year-round is super-fine graphite powder. Larry’s eyes got as big as Ron had ever seen them - no one had thought of using graphite powder as a lubricant. Maybe that was why Ron’s rifle was such a tack driver. Rummaging around in the case, Larry found a small tube of superfine graphite powder. Once Chief Smith had the rifle apart, he asked Ron to come up and help him put it back together, and lubricate the parts as he saw fit. Ron put a very small amount of graphite powder on all pivot points, and the bolt. He cycled the action a couple of times, and it was even slicker than it was before. Evidently graphite had worn off a couple of internal parts. Ron wondered aloud if the gun would shoot better or worse now. Since everyone wanted to see him shoot anyway, the adjourned the meeting to the shooting range. They called ahead and cleared the range.

While Ron set up, a team of runners was organized to pull targets, and all the instructors were on the benches with their spotting scopes, ready for a shooting demonstration. Ron could really feel the pressure now, and took his time calming down. It took 2 trips through the 23rd psalm before he felt confident enough to get ready to shoot. He looked up and the Range Master nodded, then retreated to his scope. The wind was blowing from left to right at about 5 knots, so Ron added left windage, and called a trial shot. His first shot was just outside the X-ring to the left, so he took some of the windage out. He started reciting the 23rd Psalm again, and started getting into the Zone. He never remembered pulling the trigger 5 times, but when he

looked through the scope again, there were 5 shots in the X-ring in a small cloverleaf pattern. There was plenty of space around the group and the outer edge of the 5-inch x-ring, so he might have beaten his best group yet. As soon as he stood up, a runner took off like he was running the 100-yard dash to retrieve the target and put a fresh one up. Ronnie Barrett was stunned. He'd heard the reports, but until now never realized how good of a shot Ron Williams was. He wondered if he built a 25mm version of this gun, how far he could shoot an x-ring group with it. He remembered the Bushmaster project, and the 1,000 yard 28mm group he was reported to have shot, and realized this guy had a God-Given gift for long distance shooting, and if the Gunny at Elmendorf was right, his kid Jake had it too.

When they finally got the target back and measured it, then subtracted the bullet diameter, Ron realized he had done it again. He shot a 3.98 inch group at 1,000 yards under tremendous pressure. Ron decided that now was a good time to become a "shooting coach" and asked the Instructors to come up one at a time to shoot the rifle. While someone was videotaping the entire sequence, Ron talked the senior instructor through setting the rifle up for his build and shooting style, then how to get into the proper position to shoot the rifle. Once he had the bipod and monopod set, he could see the X-ring right in the center of the scope. He took a firing grip on the rifle, and Ron retreated to the table. He fired 5 shots at the target while Ron watched him. According to the spotting scope, he shot a 10-inch group, but Ron could see a slight twitch in his right adductor muscle every time he fired. He walked up to the instructor, and asked him if he could make a suggestion. Ron guessed that the Senior Instructor was an old-school Marine that was taught to shoot Marine Prone without the bipod, since his adductor muscle twitched every time he shot, which normally happened as the body's response to the recoil, but would throw your aim off if you were using a bipod and monopod setup. Ron suggested the Master Chief pretend he was a jelly fish and relax behind the gun, and just concentrate on sight alignment, trigger squeeze, and follow-through. He relaxed visibly as Ron spoke, and he handed the instructor a full magazine of BMG Match rounds, and retreated back to the tables. This time he shot an 8-inch group, which was the smallest group he had shot ever on the 1,000 yard line. He stood up, shook Ron's hand, then gave him a "guy hug", and sat down.

He addressed the rest of the instructors. "Gentlemen, we've been shooting long distance for decades, and sometimes we pick up bad habits we're not even aware of that limit our ability to shoot really small groups. I know a Sniper is more worried about that first shot and getting in position to take the shot, but shooting techniques are still important especially with this rifle, since it just is getting started at 1,000 yards. I wouldn't be surprised if someone doesn't start hitting bullseyes at 2,000 yards as soon as the optical technology catches up." He walked over to Gene and whispered in his ear, and Gene nodded

"Right now there is a new LAV that I worked on that can hit a man-sized target at 5 miles using a highly modified Bushmaster cannon re-designed by Barretts, with a brand-new video-optical sighting system that works night and day. I shot a 28mm 1-hole group at 1,000 yards with it during the early prototype stage when the gun and the T&E mount were secured to a 6x6 foot

block of concrete. A 4-inch group at 1,000 yards with this gun isn't that hard, and if you can engage a target at say 1,500 to 2,000 yards, that makes your job much easier. It also makes the jobs of the people securing our enemy's leadership that much more difficult."

Ron spent the rest of the day coaching the shooting instructors, and most of them improved their groups dramatically. When they watched the videotape later, the instructors realized they needed to re-vamp the course of instruction, since they concentrated more on field-craft than shooting ability. They realized with this gun, someone who was a better shot, and poorer at field craft could out-range a sniper trained in the old methods by about 50%. So far Marine Snipers were told not to take shots at man-sized targets outside of a half-mile, even with their M-82a1 Barrett rifles. With the new suppressor, the enemy wouldn't have a clue where they were, and they could resume anti-personnel shooting like they had in Vietnam. Shooting an enemy's field commanders was extremely demoralizing to the troops, especially when it was a shot out of the blue.

Chapter 41 - Training the Trainers

The next day, they moved back into the conference room. The Sergeant in charge of the security detail was pleased that Ron and Gene had decided to check their sidearms in the VIP safe. Once everyone was seated, the Master Chief in charge of the Shooting School called the meeting to order, and 2 marines rolled a huge white board to the center of the stage.

“Ok, we need to re-write the curriculum - so let’s brainstorm it out!”

Ron spoke up “We don’t need to reinvent the wheel here, let’s reuse the parts of the curriculum that works - I read your most recent training manual, and the only part I’d change was the part about long-distance shooting. With the new Barretts M -200, a realistic engagement distance of 1,000 yards should change your shooting philosophy. Between the super-long range of the gun, and the suppressor hiding the muzzle blast, and disguising the direction of the shot, a well-hidden sniper could decimate an entire headquarters company, getting off at least 5 shots before they had a clue where he was shooting from.”

The senior Sniper Instructor was thinking about what Ron was saying. If he dropped a 2-man Scout Sniper team behind the lines of an army in the field, and they got within 1,000 yards of their Headquarters area, they could easily decapitate that army and either force their surrender or severely hinder their ability to fight a war. Generals would have to live underground to be safe from snipers, and junior officers wouldn’t want to show their faces either. The risk to the sniper team would be minimal, since the opposition wouldn’t have a clue where they were, unless they didn’t choose their hide wisely, and were hiding in the one obvious spot that a sniper would be. His snipers already had the field craft skills, and all they needed was the long-distance shooting skills. He was hoping that some of them would be capable of hitting a man-sized target at a mile. With a BMG-50 round, any hit would probably be lethal. He called Ron up to the white board, and had him start outlining his procedure for setting up the rifle and adjusting the rifle to the shooter. Adjusting the rifle should be a 1-time thing if they could afford to issue an M -200 to each shooter. He said the Springfield M -25would be a good rifle for the back-up shooter, and he’d love to find out what Swarovski could come up with in the lines of spotting scopes, given the new optics they used in the new daylight scope. Once Ron was finished outlining the procedure to fit the stock to the shooter, he asked Ron to outline his procedure for getting set up to shoot, including adjusting and setting the bipod and monopod. Finally he had Ron detail the ideal shooting position behind the scope. Once he finished, Ron threw it open for questions, and there were a lot of them.

Someone sent out for sandwiches and soda, so they could keep working through lunch. One really old-school instructor remembered some stuff Carlos Hathcock had suggested, but for some reason the Marines never implemented, and Ron was saying the same stuff. It was like “deja-vu” all over again! The whole session reminded him of the old EF Hutton commercials. Everyone was hanging on Ron’s every word. The meeting was being taped, so they would have

it for later.

The Senior Instructor had another flash of insight when he remembered the Night Vision Scope contained a laser designator. Instead of shooting individual officers, if they could designate the command bunker, a laser-guided JDAM could ruin their collective days. He'd have to pass that idea up the chain of command and get target designation added to the syllabus. Ron wrapped up the session in time for everyone to make it to the mess hall. Ron wasn't off the hook even then, as some of the instructors sat with him while they ate dinner. Ron said grace, and several Instructors said Amen, then they ate and talked. It was like the Bull sessions they held after hours in the Instructor's lounge. Their discussions could get blunt and heated, but they still respected each other. Ron didn't quite feel like he was in front of the Spanish Inquisition, but felt the resistance some instructors had to changing the way the Marines did things. Finally Ron said "I'm here just to explain and teach the employment of this new weapons system, and to provide instruction in how to teach others to shoot this rifle to its full potential. Right up to the point that Congress disbanded the Air Force, I was scheduled to go to the Academy, and General Shepard already had my appointment in hand. I wanted to fly the Strike Eagle, and that opportunity was taken away from me, so this is the only opportunity I'll have to give back to my country, so I wanted to make the most of it. Sorry if I'm coming across like a Revival Preacher, but I have some ideas I want to get across, and little time to do it."

Ron's little speech struck a chord with the Marines. They knew he wasn't just another know-it-all consultant coming in to tell them how to do their jobs. The session the next morning went much better, and that evening they re-located to the shooting range to learn how to use the new night vision sight. Ron asked Larry to run that, since he wasn't an expert on the system. Larry helped Ron set the night scope up for him, and Ron was impressed, he could see the target even better than last time. They all put on hearing protection, and broke out their spotting scopes, and Ron fired another 5-shot group. It wasn't as good as his daylight groups, but he still managed a 6-inch group at 1,000 yards. Larry talked the rest of the instructors through shooting the scope, and they all shot groups that were slightly larger than their daytime groups, except for the 2 instructors that had field experience with the latest Night Vision scope. Their groups were only $\frac{1}{2}$ " bigger than their daytime groups. They explained the difference as due to experience with the system, since the older NVS used the same aim point, and they were used to it.

The next day, they each received a printed copy of what they were talking about, and they spent the day going through their copies and editing it. The group went through the document after lunch, and they were done by dinner. They added things that they discussed later that day, and added sections on the NVS. Ron had been on base almost a week, when he asked the instructors if they had any questions or if there was any areas he didn't cover. The Chief Instructor stood after he could see that there were no real questions, and thanked Ron for coming. Ron handed the instructors his business card, and suggested that if they had any questions, to feel free to call or e-mail him with them. When he finished, the Chief told Ron that they were finished with him, and Gene wanted to play some more golf with the Base CO,

so he had a couple of days to kill. He handed Ron a cell phone so they could reach him if he were needed, and told him to take the next couple of days to go sightseeing, and he could stay in VIP quarters.

There was an air-conditioned SUV out front, and someone had taken the time to highlight the route to Pearl Harbor, and enclose tickets to the major attractions in Honolulu. Ron remembered he packed his digital camera in his bags, and drove over to VIP quarters to retrieve it, and his Para-Ord. He felt safe on base, but he was taking no chances off base. Ron didn't know, but all his tickets had a special code on them identifying him as a VIP with special access privileges. As he drove south to Pearl, he saw the huge naval base surrounding the Memorial. He went to the exhibit, and was deeply moved by the images he saw. Hollywood didn't do justice to the horrors of war. Finally he boarded the boat for the trip out to the Arizona Memorial. Ron thought that was one of the spookiest, but most somber places he had been in his life. He took several pictures, and when he was finished, it was almost time for dinner, so he drove back to the base, presented his TS ID card, and the guard told him to drive straight to the VIP area and park, since the vehicle didn't have a base tag on it. He explained that if the vehicle was parked anywhere else on the base, it might be towed due to new anti-terrorism regulations. Ron was pleasantly surprised to see Gene in the VIP cafeteria, sitting with several generals. He walked up to them and said "Excuse me General Shepard, may I join you?" Gene almost laughed at Ron's formality, then realized it was for the benefit of the other generals seated with him. "Generals, I'm sure some of you know Ron Williams." The generals stood and shook Ron's hand and introduced themselves. One of them said "Ron, I'm really glad you could come from Alaska and teach my Instructors about the new Barretts rifle. That weapon will save a bunch of Marine lives."

"How so General?"

"We have to accomplish the mission, regardless of the cost, and if we can send 2 Marines with that rifle behind lines, and take out the Enemy headquarters, the battle is over, saving the lives of all the other Marines that would have to invade the country in a normal battle. Between the long-range capability and the laser designator built into the NVS, that is one very capable weapon, and frankly, I'm glad they're on our side!"

Ron agreed, and the conversation returned to Gene and the other generals telling old war stories. Ron listened intently. It was like old friends getting together, even though none of these men had served together. When dinner was over, Ron excused himself and went to his room to get some sleep. He caught up with Gene the next morning at breakfast, and he told Ron that he had golfing sessions scheduled for the next two days, then they could fly home. Ron said he had enough tickets to attractions to last 2 days, so he'd see him on Friday morning to fly home. Gene said he'd leave a note at the desk Thursday with their flight number and time it left the VIP terminal. He looked at his watch and told Ron he had to be at the base golf course in half an hour, so he'd see Ron later. Ron said goodbye to Gene's retreating back.

He spent the next 2 days seeing the sights, and driving around the island past Hanauma Bay, and the North Shore. He stopped at the Banzai pipeline, since the waves were up. He couldn't understand why someone would try to ride a 50ft. wave over a 10-foot deep reef that would rip your skin off if you fell off your board, but then again, he didn't understand why Steve would volunteer for the PJs either. He kept going around the North Shore, which was actually the Northwest Shore, to a point that someone had noted on his map as being a beautiful spot for sunsets. He got to Kaena point with half an hour to spare, so he set up his tripod, and configured his camera to take sunset shots. He decided to use the cable release to see if he could record the "green flash" he had heard about. One of his best pictures was almost totally an accident as a couple was walking along the beach, and silhouetted against the sunset with their footprints in the sand coming into the center of frame from the lower right corner. Once the sun finally set, he had a long drive back in the dark to the base at Kaneohe Bay. One of the locals recommended a place to stop and eat, and he was glad he listened. They served Hawaiian cuisine, and the prices were reasonable, unlike the rest of the island as he had heard. He drove back to the gas station, topped off the tank, then thanked the attendant for the tip. He suggested a quicker route back to the base, and Ron checked it, and it was almost half the distance he traveled up the coast on the way up. If he took 930 to 803 to the H2, to H1E, to 63 to H3 right into the base, it would save him almost an hour of driving time, especially at night. Since he couldn't see anything but the roadway, there wasn't much point of driving back along the coast. When he got to the gate at the base, the guards were much more wary, since not many people drove into the base at night. He told the guards he was out sightseeing, and was shooting the sunset at Kaena point, and just got back. When he showed his ID, they let him in, and closed the gate right behind him.

The next day he went shopping for gifts in Waikiki. What passed for a swimsuit amazed him. He hadn't seen so many bare butts since the last time he gave the 3 Amigos a bath years ago! When he got to the open air market, the sellers were hawking a bunch of cheap imported junk, then someone suggested Hilo Hatties had the best Hawaiian shirts and dresses in the islands, and the best prices. He got directions and drove over there. It was nearly impossible to find a parking space, and just as he was about to give up, someone pulled out of a space. He pulled in, skipped the tour, and walked right into the sales floor. He walked up to the Hawaiian shirt racks, got Jake a Medium, and the rest of them a small, and got Nancy a Medium floor-length muumuu she could wear as a nightgown - right like she ever wore one! Next to the shirts was the jewelry counter. He was all set to check out when Ron spotted a beautiful piece of jewelry. It was a sterling silver cross, and some little ancient Hawaiian woman was sitting right there with a lit torch making more of them. Ron asked her if she could mount a Cubic Zirconia $\frac{1}{2}$ carat round solitaire in the intersection using a prong mount. She smiled and said that he must know something about jewelry. "Just what I read in books." She said it would be \$50 extra for the time and trouble. Ron said if she did an excellent job, he'd pay her \$150 for the cross (they were marked \$50 each). She said she had some beautiful sterling silver Italian rope chains in stock, and she could put it on a 20" chain for \$20. The lady was so nice that he told her if she'd take his American Express card and put it in a nice velvet box, he'd pay her \$200 if she paid the sales tax. Her eyes lit up, and she said she'd have it done in an hour. They had a coffee shop,

or he could take the tour for free, and she handed him a card good for a free tour.

Since he had an hour to kill anyway, he decided to take the tour. When he was finished an hour later, she smiled and said "Aloha - I just finished the cross." She showed him the cross, and he asked to borrow her loupe. He checked the soldering job on the mount, and she knew what she was doing, it was practically invisible, and the cross didn't show any signs of damage from the heat. He asked if he could pay for everything together, and she said she could ring up his clothing purchases as well. He handed her his AMEX, and she saw that it was a business card from Allakaket Airlines. She asked where that was, and Ron said Central Alaska. He was the owner of the airline. She smiled, took the card and swiped it through the reader, and handed him the receipt for his signature. She charged him \$200 for the cross and the stone, and the marked price on the shirts and muumuu. He thanked her, signed the receipt, and picked up his purchases. She not only put the necklace in a beautiful gift box, she gift wrapped it in some pretty Hawaiian print paper. Ron thanked her, and walked out the door, right into one of Honolulu's finest. "Excuse me officer, I was just leaving."

"You're ten minutes over your meter."

"Sorry officer, I was making some purchases inside Hilo Hatties and lost track of time. How much do I owe you?"

"Don't worry about it - you're here now, Aloha!"

"Thanks officer."

Ron was glad that encounter went smoothly, even with his Federal CCW, it would be a hassle to explain why he was armed to the teeth. He pulled carefully out of his parking space and drove back to the Marine base where it was safe! He made it back in time to join General Shepard and his cohorts for dinner. When dinner was over, Gene told him that their flight left at 0900 tomorrow from the VIP terminal, and a Hummer would drive them over from VIP quarters at 0845. Ron hoped they had some Marines with strong backs to carry his rifles and the rest of the ammunition. Since Ronnie Barrett didn't want to lug the ammo back with him, he gave the 3 ammo boxes that were left over full of 50-cal ammo to Ron. Ron thanked Gene, and went upstairs for a quick shower and some sleep.

The next morning, he was up early, got dressed and packed, and headed down for breakfast at 0800. Gene met him for breakfast, and at 0840, an MP Sergeant walked in, and asked them for their room keys so they could load their stuff in the Hummers. He said he would check them out as well. Gene and Ron handed him their electronic room keys, and thanked the Sergeant, who saluted Gene again since Gene was in uniform for the return trip. Ron asked him why he was in uniform, and Gene said the Base CO said it would be a good idea, or else they might think they were a CONDEL. Ron got a laugh when he realized that the Marines would be proper to a CONDEL, but they would go out of the way for a general in uniform, even an Air

Force uniform. Besides he was pretty sure Gene missed the VIP treatment. He noticed the other day when Gene was wearing golf clothes that his ball cap had scrambled eggs and 3 gold stars on it, just to make sure every Marine that saw him knew he was a visiting General. While they couldn't salute him when he was out of uniform, they'd show the proper respect. At 0845, they boarded the Hummer for the short ride to the VIP terminal. Both Gene and Ron pinged the metal detectors, but they were ready with their Federal CCW's, and the MP Sergeant waved them through. The Crew Chief of the VC-11a checked their ID's again as they boarded, and saluted Gene. Once they were seated, the aircraft was pushed back, and the engines spooled up from idle as they taxied toward the runway. Ron handed Gene a headphone, and loaded a Beethoven CD this time for the flight home.

Someone must have called ahead, because when they landed at Elmendorf, the 007 was waiting for them. Several airmen grunted and groaned while they transferred their baggage. Once they were airborne, Gene said "I almost forgot, here you go."

The letter was addressed to Ron Williams, and the return address was the office of the Commandant of the Marines. Ron opened it:

Dear Ron Williams. I'd like to extend a Bravo Zulu to you for a job well done. According to the CO in charge of the Scout Sniper program, your information was invaluable to the USMC, and you've earned this. Thanks for saving Marine Lives.

General Michael Hagee, Commandant USMC
Semper Fi

Attached was a check made out to Ron Williams for \$100,000.00 as a consulting fee. He didn't show the check to Gene, because he didn't want to offend the General, but he showed him the letter.

"Ron, General Hagee wrote that himself. I'd hang on to it if I were you."

"I was planning on it."

2 hours later, they landed at Allakaket, and someone helped them unload the helicopter, and Ron drove home. He hugged the kids and Nancy, then gave them their gifts, and whispered to Nancy that she'd get hers in their bedroom. She giggled, and shooed the kids into the den in the basement. When they got behind closed doors, Nancy attacked Ron, who obviously missed his wife, but was too tired to really enjoy it. They wound up cuddling in bed, then Ron handed her presents to her. She opened the big package with the muumuu in it, and slipped it on. Ron handed her a smaller package, and she tore it open. When she saw the necklace and put it around her neck, she almost took off the muumuu and attacked him again. He said "Nada Mas!" then they both laughed, remembering the old Roberto Duran joke. A couple of hours later, Nancy disentangled herself from Ron and slipped the muumuu back on and went to check

on the kids. They were playing in the den with Starsky and Hutch.

Chapter 42 - Birthday Surprise

Ron had ordered the 2 M-25's from Springfield Armory, with the scopes, bipods, cases, and 20 20-round mags (10 each) through AA's FFL Dealer. They got such a good price that instead of the Leupold scopes, he got 4 more of the 6-20x50 Mil-dot BDC scopes from Springfield. They normally listed for \$899.00, but thanks to a cancellation of a government contract, Springfield was sitting on a bunch of them, and they got them for around \$600 each including the 30mm QD mounting rings, the sunshades, and a box of batteries. Jake's 14th birthday was right around the corner, so Bear flew in one day, picked the rifles up, mounted and boresighted the scopes, and left them at Bill's place for safe-keeping. Jake's 14th birthday wasn't quite as noisy as the last couple, until he opened the big box and squealed like a girl. He ran over and gave his dad a Bear hug, then his Mom. When they finished Ron told Jake that they could go over to Bear's place tomorrow, and try out their new range. Since the last time they shot, Ron had the helicopter lift his tractor to Bear's place, and they logged out enough of the forest to extend the range to 1,000 yards, now he wouldn't have to go to Elmendorf to shoot. Ron was anticipating the Army would want their Instructors trained on the Barretts M - 200 as well, and thought that it would be easier to have them come to Alaska Survival than for him to fly around the country training everyone. Besides, that way, they could charge the government for the use of the facility. Bear now had a huge supply of wood stacked up, and chopped it into sections as needed. Actually, his kids would chop and split it, since he was assigning them chores, and splitting wood was one of them.

The next day they took the SuperGoose to Bear's place, and they set up to shoot. Josh, Sarah, and David went to the 300-yard line to shoot their AR-15's. Ron suggested they start on the 100-yard line just to verify Bear's zero, since he had boresighted it, but it could still be off. It took quite a while for Ron and Jake to get Jake's gun adjusted to him, but finally they got it exactly right. Jake extended the bipod, and was wishing for a monopod, but was SOL. When he got into a good shooting position, he got behind the scope and dialed up the magnification until he could clearly see the x-ring and call his shots. They put their Wolf Ears on, and got ready to shoot. Ron had broken out his spotting scope to confirm Jake's shots. Jake loaded the factory stock mag with 10 rounds of Match ammo, and got ready. The trigger broke unexpectedly, and Ron could see a strike right in the X-ring. Jake fired 5 more rounds and they were outside the x-ring, so Ron knew Jake was nervous, or there was a mechanical problem with the gun. Ron stood up, and Jake put the safety on the rifle.

"Jake, that first round was right in the x-ring, and the rest were outside. Why do you think they were outside?"

"Not sure dad, there isn't enough wind to affect my aim at that short of a distance. I guess I'm nervous and excited about shooting a new gun."

"OK, let's try your relaxation techniques before you shoot this next group, OK son?"

Jake settled down behind the rifle just as his dad showed him, and steadied his breathing and pulse. Finally he started reciting the 23rd Psalm. When he looked through the scope again, the image was sharp and clear, and the scope wasn't moving. He moved his trigger finger a fraction of an inch, and his first round went through the center of the x-ring. He managed to keep the scope focused on the x-ring, and squeezed the trigger 4 more times. When he finished, he could clearly see 5 bullet holes in the x-ring of the 100-yard sighting target, he knew he shot a group that measured less than 1" in diameter because the x-ring was exactly 1inch in diameter. Jake cleared the gun, and walked over to his dad. "How was that Dad?"

"Not bad for your second group out of a new gun. Now we need to move you to the 300 yard range. Make sure you set the elevation knob to the 300-yard mark, and you should be right in the x-ring again."

Jake carefully carried his rifle over to the far side of the 300-yard line as far away from his younger siblings as he could so his muzzle bark wouldn't disturb them. He got set up again, and Ron joined him with his spotting scope. When he got set up behind the rifle, he looked through the scope and realized he had to dial up the magnification again. He had it set for 10x, so he cranked it up to 15x, then re-focused the scope on the X-ring. When everything was perfect, he stuck a loaded 10-round magazine in the action, cycled the action, and made sure he kept his trigger finger off the trigger until he was ready to shoot. The range was still hot because Josh and Sarah were shooting off to his left, so he checked his position, got behind the scope, and concentrated on the target. He went through his relaxation techniques this time without being told, and was totally surprised when he looked at the target, and he had 5 holes in the target. Judging by the impacts, he had shot a 3" group, but it was to the left of the x-ring by 1 inch. He looked over at his dad and said "I'm 1 inch to the left, what should I do - is it me, the gun, or is there enough wind on this range to move the bullet 1 inch at 300 yards?" Ron realized he hadn't taught his son how to dope the wind. The wind was practically still on the firing line, but he could see dirt and leaves moving down near the target. He asked Jake to look at the dirt and leaves around his target, and tell him what he saw.

"It looks like there's a slight breeze from right to left, but I can't tell how fast."

"Good eye Jake. When we get home, I'm going to give you a book on long distance shooting that teaches you how to dope the wind and mirage. Let's see, that windage adjustment is 1/8 MOA. A minute-of-angle at 300 yards equals 3-inches, and you need to move it 1 inch right, so I'd add 8 clicks of right windage, you'll probably be right of the target, since it's not exact, but it will get you close. Besides, this wind is variable, so don't worry about your group sizes for now."

Jake dialed in 8 clicks of right windage, and got behind the scope. When the sight was centered on the x-ring, and he was steady, he touched the trigger, and his first shot was through the x-ring, but on the right side of it. Jake kept firing, and 4 shots later, he had all 5 rounds inside the 3-inch x-ring. Ron thought "not bad for his first time with this gun. I'd love to see what he

does at 600 yards, but I don't want to discourage him." So he said "OK Jake, go ahead and practice on the 300-yard line for now. Once you get used to this gun, we'll move you back to the 600-yard line. Jake thought the 300-yard line was plenty tough enough, but didn't say anything. Ron wandered over to where his 3 other kids were shooting with Bear's 2 sons while Jake continued to shoot at the 300-yard line. Ron got behind his spotting scope, and was pleasantly surprised to find that Sarah was shooting about a 2.5" group, Josh was shooting right around 3 inches, and David was holding his own, but was averaging 4-5 inches. He was almost 2 years younger than Sarah, but Ron knew he was mature enough to be shooting at the 300-yard line with his older brother and sister. Seeing that everyone was doing OK, Ron broke out his M-25, and walked to the 100-yard line to sight his scope in. Once he was satisfied with his zero, he picked up and moved to the 300-yard line next to Jake. He hoped the competition would motivate him to try harder. They shot for several more hours until Ron could tell Jake was getting tired. Ron was proud of his son, he'd fired about 500 rounds downrange, and had reduced his group size by over $\frac{1}{2}$ ". When they finished, Ron sent them downrange to retrieve their targets, then they packed up and went home. Ron showed their targets to Nancy, who spent the day with Anne helping her get her garden planted. Ron suggested that next time they come with Ron and the kids; since Anne could see fine now and Nancy needed the long-distance practice too.

"Ron, I'm having problems with this - you're really practicing so you can shoot someone. I don't know if I could do that!"

Ron sat his wife down and said "I know it goes against your nurturing nature to consciously take a life. Remember back when you and Sally were #1 and #2 on the women's pistol competition. Bear suspected your motivation for becoming such a good shot was to defend your kids. Ever since you shot Steve, you've hardly practiced at all. Do you want to talk about it?"

"I still have nightmares where I see his brains blown all over the church, except in my dreams the effects are much more horrific, and everyone in the church including me gets covered with brains and blood. I know it's not logical, and it was him or us, but that's why I haven't been practicing, I'm afraid if I do, the nightmares will get worse and more frequent."

"Have you talked to my mom about it?"

"Yeah, that's what we were doing today - she's helpful, but she still hasn't been able to crack through."

"Nancy, I know how you feel - I had nightmares for a week afterward about Steve, but in my dreams, he got back up and hosed the entire church, killing everyone. If you want to, I think we should talk to Bill about it, maybe he can help?"

"At this point I'm willing to try anything - let's give him a call!"

“Bill, its Ron, you busy? Ok, Nancy and I need to come over and talk about something. OK, we’ll drop the kids over at my Mom’s and come right over.”

“Ok, let’s get the kids loaded up and deposit them at Mom’s - Bill said he could see us.”

They loaded the kids up in the truck and drove to Anne’s house. All Ron said was they needed to talk to Bill, they might be gone a while. Anne hugged Nancy and told her it would be all right, then they got back in the truck and drove to Bill’s office.

“Bill, Nancy and I need some counseling. Remember when Nancy and I shot Steve Stone when he tried to shoot everyone at Sam’s wedding? We’re both suffering from the effects of Delayed Stress Syndrome. We’re both having nightmares. Nancy’s dreaming that Steve’s blood and brain matter is flying all over the room, and I’m dreaming he’s gets back up and kills everyone.”

“Ron, Nancy, I’m going to skip the psychobabble, and use the “Tough love” approach. Both of you are feeling inappropriate feelings. Nancy feels guilt for taking Steve’s life, and Ron feels guilt for making Nancy take the 3rd shot when he felt he should have killed Steve by himself. Well, you’re both WRONG! Nancy, you didn’t take Steve’s life, he forfeited it when he walked into that church brandishing a machine gun and threatening to kill everyone. All you did was save everyone’s lives, including your own. What would have happened to your kids, Nancy, if Steve had succeeded in killing all of you? And Ron, aren’t you two supposed to be a team. That’s what teams do, they back each other up when times get tough. Now you two need to pray about this together, and I’ll give you a list of bible readings that will help, but you need to help each other through this, and you need to suck it up and be there for your kids and each other. Now let’s pray together.” 15 minutes later, they felt relieved, and their guilt was washed away. They still needed to help each other, but they knew that they wouldn’t have as many nightmares as before. They drove back over to Anne’s house, picked up the kids, gave Anne a big hug, and drove home. They sat down on the couch together, broke out their bible, and started reading several Old Testament accounts of God sending the Israelites to kill their enemies, and a couple of chapters in the New Testament about love. Later, Nancy asked Ron if they could go shooting tomorrow at Bear’s. He gave her a big hug, and asked her if she wanted to invite Anne. “Sure - let’s ask her!” Ron called his Mom, who answered the phone “Anne’s Babysitting Service, please leave a message after the beep.”

“Real funny Mom, would you like to go shooting with us tomorrow at Bear’s place?”

“Sure, I think that would be fun - what time?”

“We’ll pick you up at 0800, and we’re flying the SuperGoose, so you get a nice comfortable seat with your grandkids!”

“At least I’m not up front with you doing a max-performance take-off!”

“Sorry Mom, I didn’t mean to scare you! See you at eight.”

When they hung up, they were giggling like school kids. Ron knew he was in for a long night, he just hoped he could shoot worth a darn tomorrow.

The next morning, the got dressed, made breakfast, which was now a lot simpler and easier than it used to be, since the kids were old enough to either make their own, or help. They got their stuff packed and out the door by 0745. When they arrived at Anne’s house, a familiar pickup was in the driveway, so Ron got out and knocked on the door. Gene answered, then Anne said “I hope it’s OK if Gene comes with us?”

“Sure, the more the merrier. It’s a little crowded in our truck, so you might want to take Gene’s. See ya over at the plane.”

Ron got back in his truck wondering what Gene was doing over there so early in the morning. They didn’t look guilty, so he probably didn’t spend the night. He remembered his Dad told him before he died that he wanted Anne to remarry, since she was too young to remain a widow the rest of her life. Ron got along with Gene Ok, so his mom could do worse. They arrived at the plane minutes before Anne and Gene, and just managed to get everything loaded before they arrived. Gene carried 2 cased AR-15 rifles, and an ammo can full of .223 Match Ammo and their eye and ear protection. Ron and Nancy got up front, started the turbines, and let them idle until they were up to operating temperature, then bumped the throttles out of idle and started taxiing to the lake. Nancy called the tower for take-off clearance while Ron finished the checklist and configured the plane for take-off. They were clear to take off when they reached the end of the lake, so Ron advanced the throttles, and soon they were airborne. Once they cleared the far ridge line, he eased off the back pressure on the yoke to reduce their rate of climb, and flew to Bear’s lake. Ron made a very gentle water landing, and taxied out onto the ground using the ramp Bear had installed since the ground was so soft. Ron shut the plane down, and when the propellers stopped turning, he opened the cabin door and deployed the air stairs. The kids were big enough now to get themselves out of the plane safely, and Bear came over with an ATV and a trailer to help carry their guns and ammo to the shooting range. They piled everything on and secured it with straps. Bear drove over to the range while everyone else walked. Anne said she wanted to try the AR-15 on the 300 yard line, and Ron suggested they mount a 3x9x40 scope on her rifle. She thought that was a good idea, and when they caught up with Bear, he pulled out Anne’s rifle, said he’d be right back in a couple of minutes, and drove his ATV over to the lodge. He took a Simmons 3x9x40 AO scope out of storage, mounted it, and boresighted it using the laser boresighter, then put the scoped gun back in its case, and drove back out to the range. Ron suggested Anne take it to the 100-yard range to verify the zero. Ron went with his mom while Gene and Nancy got the kids organized and set up on their ranges. Bear had set most of the range up for 300 yard targets to give them enough lanes for everyone. Ron helped his mom set up, then whispered “Anything I should know about?”

“Gene showed up around breakfast like he usually does, and asked me if I wanted to go

shooting and go for a swim. I told him I had already promised you we'd go shooting at Bear's. I hope you're OK with me inviting him."

"Mom, I know you really like, and maybe love Gene. Dad told me to remind you that it was OK with him if you remarried, and he even wanted to encourage you to. I like Gene, he's a good guy. I don't think I'll be calling him Dad any time soon, but he seems to be OK with me calling him Gene."

"Thanks, I knew you'd understand. I think Gene is ready to ask me to marry him, but he's afraid I'll say no."

"OK Mom, if you want to marry him, I'm happy for you." Ron gave his mom a big hug, then finished helping her set up. She down the legs of her bipod, and looking through the scope, the target was nice and bright and steady. She put on her eyes and ears, and got behind the rifle. Ron put his on, and moved over to the spotting scope. Anne's first round went right through the x-ring, so she knew Bear's zero was right on. She fired 4 more rounds, and Ron thought she had just shot a group smaller than 1". She said "enough of this sissy stuff - let's get over to the 300-yard line, and see how the old lady does!"

Ron laughed and helped his mom carry the stuff over to the other side of the range. She set up next to Gene, who was shooting his National Match M-1a at the 300 yard line. Anne clicked up the elevation knob to allow for the longer distance, and fired a test round, then added another click. Her next round went through the X-ring, and she proceeded to put 4 more rounds in the X-ring. When she put her gun down, she saw Gene looking at her group with his mouth hanging open, then he got up, and she gave him a bear hug and a serious kiss.

Ron laughed "You two want to get a room?"

Gene finally got up the courage, kneeled on one knee, and took a ring out of his pocket. "Anne, I love you, and I know I can never replace Roy, but I want us to spend what time we have left together, will you marry me?"

Anne waited about 100 milliseconds before she said "What took you so long Gene, of course I'll marry you!" and laid a real passionate lip lock on Gene.

Nancy turned to her kids and said "I guess this means you guys just got yourselves a Grandpa!" and everyone got up and gathered for a group hug. Nancy asked Anne "So when's the wedding?"

"How about tomorrow. I just wanted something small, with Steve and your family. Ron, is it OK if Steve gives me away again?"

"Sure! He's got practice already."

They all started laughing at that. Ron grabbed his shoe phone, called Bill, and handed the phone to Anne “Bill, its Anne. Gene and I are getting married tomorrow, can you do the ceremony on short notice? Great - see you tomorrow!”

“Ok guys we’re all set for tomorrow. I hate to cut this short, but we’ve got a million things to do. Ron, can you fly us back to Allakaket so we can get ready for tomorrow?”

“Sure Mom - let’s go!”

Bear helped them pack up, and gave Gene a big hug “Bout time Sir - I was wondering when you’d get up the nerve to ask her. Take care, and I’ll talk to you later.” After they loaded the plane, they got on board. Ron noticed that Gene and Anne were sitting together holding hands the whole flight. He was happy for his Mom, and hoped they would be happy together. After they landed at Allakaket and got unloaded, Anne and Gene said they had to meet with Bill, and they’d talk to them later. Ron got his family packed up and loaded into the pickup for the drive home. When they got home, Starsky and Hutch greeted them, and Ron noticed one or both puppies had an accident. “Jake, Josh Clean-up Detail!” They got out the paper towels, cleaned up the mess, and flushed it down the toilet. Jake and Josh picked up the puppies and petted them, then carried them outside in case they needed to go some more. When it was obvious they had already did everything they were going to, they carried the pups back inside and put them on the bearskin rug. A couple of hours later, the phone rang, and Nancy talked with Anne, getting the details for the wedding tomorrow. Everyone was going to meet in the chapel at noon. It would be just family, so they weren’t going to get all formal and fancy.

The next day, they met at the chapel, and right at noon, Anne marched down the isle wearing a simple dress. Gene was wearing a suit, as were Ron and Steve. Nancy made the kids wear their Sunday best. The simple ceremony only took 45 minutes, then Bill told Gene to kiss his bride, and they walked down the isle together. They had a small reception at Anne and Gene’s house. (Jim’s old place) which was twice the size of Gene’s house, so they were going to live there. After the reception, Gene whispered to Anne “Now its Honeymoon time!” To which Anne said “I hope I remember how!” and they both had a good laugh.

Chapter 43 - Compensation

Monday Morning, Ron got an early phone call.

“Ron Williams”

“Speaking”

“Mr. Williams, this is Ronald Sugar, the CEO of Northrop Grumman Inc.”

Ron turned on his tape recorder, and said “How may I help you sir?”

“I know you’re probably taping this call, but that’s OK because I am too. I’ll get right to the point. I just found out what Jack Snyder was up to, and I can assure you that Northrop Grumman had nothing to do with it, or any foreknowledge of his illegal activities.”

“I know that sir, my question is what are you calling for?”

“Ok. I’m trying to avoid you suing Northrop Grumman over what Jack was up to. I’m prepared to offer to replace all your TurboGoose Aircraft with brand new SuperGoose aircraft.”

“That’s awfully generous sir, but I had no intention of suing your company - I was assured that your company had nothing to do with what happened, and suing people at the drop of a hat isn’t my style, I’m a Born Again Christian.”

“I’m glad you’re not planning on suing us, but we found out that the FAA will have to decertify all the TurboGoose airframes for Airline Transport in 10 years anyway.”

“Why didn’t I hear of this?”

“Ron, we have 10 SuperGoose aircraft sitting unsold taking up ramp space at the El Segundo Plant we need for something else. If I remember correctly, you have 8 TurboGoose aircraft we can trade you for 10 SuperGoose, if you sign a declaration that you won’t sue us over this unfortunate incident.”

“I can assume these aircraft are free of any unauthorized electronics?”

“Any unauthorized electronics as you call them have been removed from all aircraft in our possession, and we have notified previous buyers of the existence of possible unauthorized electronics, and how to safely remove them.”

“How about the avionics, the prototype was pretty Spartan?”

“We took your advice and upgraded the avionics suite in all our SuperGoose. They match the avionics and features of your current SuperGoose. I understand you have SuperGoose #1.”

“Yes Sir, the RCAF awarded me tail number 1 instead of a cash payment.”

“That was awfully nice of them. Anyway, the offer is open for the next 30 days.”

“What are you planning to do with our existing TurboGoose?”

“There’s a limited market for TurboGoose with collectors and private pilots who like or need amphibians.”

“You’re not planning on selling them to someone who is going to start a competing airline?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Ok, I’ll need that assurance in writing; I don’t want to subsidize any potential competition.”

“I’ll have legal work on it. So do we have a deal?”

“Can you e-mail the agreement to my attention? I’d like to review the agreement first, and have our corporate attorney review it as well.”

“That would be reasonable. Ok, as soon as Legal finishes with it, I’ll e-mail you a copy. If you want the aircraft, you’ll have to fly to Los Angeles to pick them up; we can’t spare the ferry pilots since they’re all tied up with deliveries.”

“One last question, how are the aircraft configured?”

“If memory serves, they should be configured like SG#1 including the conformal liquid oxygen tanks.”

“Ok, if you could put the agreement in writing, and e-mail it to me, I’ll arrange for ferry pilots to fly our aircraft to Los Angeles, and fly the new SuperGoose back.”

“Nice doing business with you Mr. Williams.”

Ron called BA and gave him the Reader’s Digest version of his conversation with Donald Sugar.

“Ron, the CEO of a multi-million dollar company doesn’t call up to chew the fat. Something must have happened for their legal department to tell them to settle. Maybe they came across a memo in Jack’s private files that made it through the corporate chain of command implicating

Northrop Grumman in conspiracy to commit espionage. Either way, that's a sweetheart of a settlement offer. They're basically offering you over \$2 Million worth of aircraft to settle out of court before you even file a lawsuit."

"What's this deal with the FAA decertifying all the TurboGoose Aircraft in 10 years?"

"My guess is some Senator that is in Northrop's hip pocket got the FAA to decertify the aircraft so that users of the TurboGoose would have to buy the new aircraft. Luckily for us, this little snag will cost them 10 planes, less the trade-in value of the old planes. They might get \$100 thousand from private collectors each for the TurboGoose, since no one in their right mind would buy an aircraft that would be decertified in 10 years for a commercial route."

"Man, when we get lucky, we really get lucky. It would cost us \$4 Million to replace those aircraft if he hadn't offered to exchange them for SuperGoose planes."

"Don't count your chickens just yet Ron!"

"What do you mean?"

"They could sell those aircraft out from under you, or any number of dodges. They might say that your aircraft aren't worth what they thought they were. I'll get with our Corporate Attorney to head them off at the pass. He knows several tricks to lock them into this settlement offer, or they will wind up owing us 5-10 times the settlement when we're through with them."

"OK BA, you take care of it!"

1 week later, BA called Ron "It's a done deal, our Corporate Lawyer talked to their Corporate Lawyer, and they're both satisfied that neither one of us is trying to screw each other. The agreement was signed this morning, so all you have to do is fly 8 planes out and 10 planes back in the next week - they need the space."

"Ok, I'll get the pilots lined up, and line up fuel stops on the way down and back." Ron called Don at the FAA office, and asked he could get hold of a couple of pilots that were qualified to fly a SuperGoose from Los Angeles to Allakaket. Don said he had recently upgraded his certs to include the equivalent of an ATP, so he could fly 1, and the IP still had his certs, so that was 2. Ron asked Don if Nancy could fly a plane back by herself. Don knew Ron would come up short pilots if he couldn't use Nancy, and it wasn't like she was flying passengers. She had almost half as many landings and take-offs in the SuperGoose as Ron did. Don said OK, but she'd have to fly formation on Ron so she wouldn't get in trouble. Ron asked if flying in trail would be OK. Don said that if they could stay within 5 miles of each other, and not fly in IFR conditions, he'd OK it. Ron reminded him that they would probably have to refuel up and back in Seattle, and probably at SeaTac, one of the busiest airports in the Pacific Northwest. Don realized that SeaTac's ATC was so huge that landing at a nearby commuter airport would be

just as bad, so he hoped Ron knew what he was doing. Ron said he'd call Don when they were ready to go, and give them a day's heads-up. They needed to meet them in Allakaket, and the planes stationed in Fairbanks would have to fly down separately. Don said he'd file flight plans for all 8 TurboGoose aircraft to fly from Southern Alaska to SeaTac, and south to Los Angeles. Ron said that the planes were sitting at Northrop Grumman's El Segundo Plant. Don knew that NG's plant had a huge runway, almost as long as LAX's, so they would be OK. He suggested staying overnight in LA and flying home the next morning to avoid Pilot Fatigue. Ron thought that was a good idea, since it would take forever to fly from Alaska to LA at 250 knots. Ron thanked Don, and said he'd get back to him.

He walked out to the living room, and told Nancy he needed a favor, and explained the deal for the new SuperGoose planes. Then he told her she'd have to fly solo 2300 miles back from LAX to Allakaket. At 250 knots and around 2,000 nautical miles, it would be a 10 hour flight, plus refueling time at SeaTac. Nancy realized Ron wouldn't ask her to do something that dangerous if 1) he didn't think she could do it, and 2) he badly needed her help. Ron told her they would be staying overnight in LA and flying out first thing in the morning, since Don recommended sleeping in LA overnight to avoid pilot fatigue from flying 24 hours straight. Ron said if it got really bad, they could stay overnight in Seattle as well. Nancy thought that would be a better idea, since they were in no hurry to get the extra 2 aircraft back, since only the original 8 had to get back to fly their routes. That jarred Ron's memory, and he called BA to have him arrange a 48-hr shut down of service so they could replace their aircraft. BA got right on it. Alaska Airlines wouldn't be happy, but stuff happened. He offered to fly urgent passengers via their corporate helicopters for the duration of the shut-down, which calmed Bradley down. Luckily it wasn't peak season, and they only made 1 flight per day from Anchorage and Fairbanks, and they had both 007's that could carry 8 passengers each. It would take longer, but they'd get there.

Ron made hotel reservations in LA at the Sheraton he stayed at last time, and looked up hotels adjacent to SeaTac, and found one that they could stay at if they needed to. 3 days later, they were ready to go, so Ron called Don at the FAA office, and asked him to be in Allakaket at 0800 tomorrow morning. He and the IP were going to fly a TurboGoose down, and they each were going to fly a SuperGoose back. Their other 6 pilots were taking off at first light to make Seattle an hour before them so there wouldn't be a traffic jam. Ron and Nancy would fly the last TurboGoose down, then they would each fly a SuperGoose back. Ron told Don they already had reservations at the Sheraton in El Segundo next to the El Segundo plant of Northrop Grumman. They were to land at the NG airfield, and take off with SuperGoose planes northbound the next morning. It would be a long couple of days, so they should bring some coffee and food. He'd already put porta-potties in each aircraft because 5 hours was an awful long time to hold it when you're drinking coffee. Ron brought a sheet for Nancy to cover herself up, and blankets and a couple of pillows in case she needed a nap on the way down. He suggested to Don that they do likewise. Ron decided he wasn't going to try to join the Mile High Club again, this trip was too long and dangerous, besides, he'd been a member so many times that it was starting to get old. He'd rather fool around on the ground were it was safer.

Ron and Nancy went to bed early, and dropped the kids off at Gene and Anne's place after dinner. They were already starting to call Gene Grandpa, and he was already starting to spoil them rotten.

The next morning, they were up around 0630, took showers, used the bathroom, drank some coffee, and used the bathroom again just to be sure their tanks were empty, then drove to the airfield. Both planes were pulled out of their hangars, and their engines idling. Ron was glad to see his orders were carried out, and everything that didn't come with the plane from the RCAF had been taken out and stored, including the paramedic kits. He still had his emergency ditch kit, and his first aid kit with him; as well as his shoulder holster containing the Colt Anaconda in .44 Magnum, and the suppressed Ruger 22/45. He had strapped on his fanny pack and his shoulder harness while Nancy made coffee, and packed a bag full of raisin-bran muffins.

Nancy thought it was overkill, but Ron realized a large portion of their flight was over water, and they had no life raft, so he hoped they didn't have to ditch. He was confused by the big yellow package inside the door of the plane as he opened the passenger compartment to crawl inside. The sticker on the package said "USN pt. #xxxxxx-xxx, 1 4-man life raft, and 4-man ditch kit." Evidently this was BA's idea. Ron guessed there was one in every one of their aircraft. He'd have to make sure that he took them back with them on the flight home.

Don and the IP, who Ron found out was called Joe, showed up 5 minutes before 0800, and quickly climbed into the other TurboGoose and were in the process of pre-flighting it, when Ron came on the radio, and requested clearance for take-off. Ron called the other Goose, and gave them the inter-plane frequency in case they needed to call. Ron set his hand-held to the inter-plane, and left his main radio on Allakaket until they left their airspace, then he switched to the Alaskan Main frequency, and monitored it until he was out of range. Once he entered Canadian Airspace, he called the national air traffic control frequency, gave them his tail number, and requested permission to transit Canadian airspace en route to Seattle. Don must have done everything right, because the controllers knew about them, and told them to maintain altitude and heading until they cleared Canadian airspace. Nancy got sleepy, and said she was going to take a nap, and to wake her when they got there. A couple of hours later, they started descending in preparation for landing. The nose-down attitude woke Nancy up, and she climbed back in the co-pilot's chair. Ron landed without incident, taxied right to the pumps, and filled his tanks full of JP-5. He didn't have any hassle paying, so he guessed BA had made credit arrangements in advance. Once they were filled, he could see the other TurboGoose landing. He taxied back out to the runway while they taxied in. He got clearance to take off again, and contacted the Air Traffic Control Center in Seattle, and they directed him to the Southbound corridor heading 166 magnetic, and got a 10,000 foot flight level since they didn't have oxygen, or a pressurized cabin. At 250 knots, it would take 3-4 hours to arrive at the Northrop Grumman airstrip in El Segundo. A little over 4 hours later, they landed at the NG private airstrip, took all their possessions out of the aircraft, thanked the maintenance chief for letting them use their portable sewage dump facility, and loaded everything into a truck that drove them over to the new planes. Ron recognized Ronald Sugar, the CEO of Northrop Grumman from his internet website, and shook his hand. "I hope it's OK to leave the planes

here tonight, and we'll take delivery first thing tomorrow, so we can be airborne at 0800."

"My legal department already made the arrangements. Here's the keys to the aircraft so you can stow your gear aboard for the return flight. Thanks for working with us on this, I was really embarrassed when I heard what Jack was up to, and I wanted to express my personal apology."

"Don't worry, as we say in Hockey, No harm, no foul. Thanks for the planes." Ronald Sugar shook Ron's hand and turned to leave. Once they had their stuff stowed aboard the new aircraft, the Maintenance Chief drove them in the company van to the Sheraton across the street. "I'll be here at 0745 tomorrow to pick you all up. See you later."

Ron and Nancy grabbed a bite to eat in their restaurant, and took a shower and went straight to sleep, they were exhausted. Their alarm went off at 0700, and they took a quick shower, got dressed, ate a light breakfast of coffee and rolls, and met the van at exactly 0745. They were on the flight line at Northrop Grumman at 0800, and had the turbines idling minutes later. They thoroughly checked the aircraft, and when they were satisfied, Ron bumped the throttles out of idle, and taxied to the fuel depot, and they topped off their tanks. The Maintenance chief signed for the fuel, so Allakaket wouldn't get billed for it, since they delivered the aircraft with fuel in the tanks, and they only took around 100 gallons each to top off their tanks. Nancy was soloing for the first time, and was nervous and excited at the same time. The only difference between what she was doing now, and what she had done hundreds of times before was that Ron wasn't sitting next to her. She was glad she gave Ron a big kiss and told him she loved him before she climbed aboard her SuperGoose, just in case. Once her turbines were in the green, she too taxied to the runway right behind her husband. They left 2 minutes apart to minimize the risk of wake turbulence, even if it was minimal. They flew west until they reached the Northbound corridor, and flew for 5 hours, because they had to detour around the western edge of SeaTac's ATC to enter the pattern from the east. Once they landed, they quickly refueled, and Ron asked Nancy how she was feeling. It was only another 6 hours max until they were home, and the autopilot worked perfectly. She was sure she could land this plane at Allakaket, so she said they should keep going. Ron shrugged and climbed back into the pilot's seat of his plane, and requested take-off clearance. They had to wait for an inbound 767, and when it had cleared, Ron took off first, since he was the best equipped to deal with the wake turbulence of the big aircraft. 2 minutes later, Nancy followed him into the air. Her take-off was a little bumpy, but as soon as she cleared the area around the airport, the air smoothed out. They turned west and flew until they were in the Northbound corridor, and then they set their autopilots, and sat back to relax. 4 hours later, Ron called Nancy on the inter-plane frequency, advising her they needed to turn for Allakaket, and to follow him. Nancy took off the autopilot, and turned to follow Ron. Suddenly, the stall warning horn sounded, and she was falling like a rock. Somehow she realized she was in either an air pocket, or a down-draft, and pushed the throttles to max, and as her airspeed climbed above 85 knots, hauled back on the stick to regain altitude. Once she was straight and level, and breathing normally again, she called Ron. "Allakaket Airlines number 2 to Number 1, over."

“What’s wrong, Nancy?”

“I hit the air pocket from hell, I’m all shook up, but the plane’s fine, and I’m flying at about 5,000 feet 5 miles behind you.”

“I’ll be there in a second to check out the plane, keep her straight and level.”

Ron pulled a wingover and dove to 5,000 feet, then came up on Nancy’s 6. “I’m right behind you. Just keep it straight and level, and I’ll fly around you and make sure.”

Ron flew up next to Nancy’s plane, and saw that nothing was damaged on the plane, so he got back on the radio “Nancy, everything’s OK, how you feeling.”

“I’m going to put the plane back on autopilot and rest for a while. Call me when we’re close to Allakaket so I can get up and land the plane.”

“OK, I’ll stick close. I’m a mile back on your 6 o’clock high.”

“Thanks hubby, keep an eye on me while I take a nap. I’ve got the radio on, and the plane is on autopilot.”

“I love you Nancy, have a good nap. We’ve got about an hour until we reach Allakaket.”

An hour later, Ron came back on the air “Nancy, wake up, we’re here.”

Ron heard the best sound he could hear when Nancy said “I’m right here, let’s get these birds down, then I’m taking a real nap!”

“I’ll follow you down Nancy. OK, flaps to full, speed to 80 knots, and turn to 175 magnetic for final approach. OK, you’re looking fine, now slowly descend to 500 feet, and reduce speed to 65 knots.”

Right as she cleared the ridge, she started floating down to the lake, and Ron followed her down. She touched down kind of rough, but not bad considering what she’d been through. As soon as Ron was down, he reversed pitch to open a gap between the two of them, then followed her up the ramp to the fuel tanks, where they shut down and climbed down. Nancy ran to her husband crying, and hugged the stuffing out of him. “I thought I’d never see you back then. I’m so glad to be alive that I feel like kissing the ground, or maybe having another kid.”

“Well you COULD do the first one, but the second one would involve a surgeon getting a knife way too close to something I want to keep, but we can pretend anyway!”

Nancy made sure Ron understood how she felt with her next kiss, pressing her body into his.

Ron said “Maybe we should leave the kids at Mom’s tonight?”

Nancy said “Race you” and ran for their truck. Ron thought “No fair, I still have to unload our suitcases and throw them in the back.” Once the truck was loaded they drove home, and they made mad passionate love the rest of the night.

Chapter 44 - The Morning After

Ron woke up around 10:00 the next morning in the arms of his wife. He realized how lucky he was; he had 4 beautiful kids, and a wife that loved him to death. He felt really protective right then, and was frustrated that something as simple as a downdraft or an air pocket almost took her from him. He swore to himself that was the last time they'd ever fly separate planes. He was stupid, he had the money, he could have hired pilots to fly the planes from Alaska to LA and back, but he wasn't thinking. He needed to talk to BA, and ask him to stop him from doing something stupid like that again. The company itself was worth over \$50 million, and he personally had between \$15 and \$17 Million in the bank, not including equity in all the subsidiaries of Allakaket Airlines. They spent the rest of the morning in bed just holding each other. Once they decided that they had to get up, (they were really hungry) Nancy slipped into her muumuu, and made brunch. Ron called his Mom, and gave her the Readers Digest version of what happened. Anne said not to worry; they'd keep the kids until they were ready to take them back.

She quit working for the doctor after she married Gene. She found out another fringe benefit of marrying a General who had never been married. He was almost as rich as BA, and had an excellent retirement package that guaranteed that he'd never have to touch his savings - so she was officially retired. Ron told her that now they had 2 extra Super Goose, if they wanted to go anywhere in the area, he could let Gene use the 007 whenever they wanted to, and they'd use the SuperGoose as their personal aircraft. Anne thought that was an excellent idea, since Gene had turned into a golf nut, and then he found out Elmendorf had a golf course that was open 6-8 months out of the year depending on the weather. He said that he'd teach her how to play so they could play together, and they'd still have time for the grandkids, and going shooting. Gene wanted Anne to teach him long-distance shooting. He couldn't beat Bear at the pistol range, but he wanted to whoop Bear's butt on the rifle range next year!

Ron called BA and told him his ideas. BA thought that would work out great, as long as the 007's weren't busy with Allakaket Airlines business, they'd be available to fly back and forth to Elmendorf, or anywhere they wanted to go within the range of the S-76. He agreed with Ron that he needed to start thinking differently. He had the money to hire people to do the risky stuff; he didn't need to take chances like that anymore. Next Ron called up the aircraft mechanic, and asked him to go over both planes with a fine-tooth comb. He told him about the incident with the air pocket/downdraft, and the coincidence that it occurred right after she disengaged the autopilot. Ron doubted it was a computer glitch, since the SuperGoose wasn't a fly-by-wire system, but used hydraulics, so whatever went wrong might have been a bad connection, or a faulty link. The Senior Aircraft Mechanic assured Ron he'd get right on it, and if he found anything, he'd be the first to know.

A couple of hours later, Ron got a cryptic message to come down to the maintenance area, and bring Gene; he'd want to see this. Ron called Gene, and said he'd be there in 10 minutes.

When they got there, the chief mechanic had the autopilot wired into a test bench, and told Ron and Gene to watch as he cycled the power on and off of the autopilot. He flicked the switch 4 times, and nothing, but the 5th time, there was a strange and unexplainable signal coming out of the autopilot. Gene put two and two together, and asked the mechanic to pull the autopilot unit from Ron's plane, and compare the signals. He was going to make some phone calls. He told the mechanic to tag this box with a non-removable ID tag, and log the tag number in his master repair log. Ron got a cold shiver, and called Bear, and told him to double check their security. If someone was really trying to kill him, and found out they missed, they might try again with a less subtle method. Bear told Ron to get back home and get his kids and everyone in or near the house, and keep his cell phone on. Bear told him to hand the phone to Gene. After a very brief conversation, Gene practically shoved Ron into his truck, and told him to take Anne and the kids, and take them all to his house. Ron drove as fast as he safely could to Anne's house, and told Anne to pack up enough for a couple of days, they were going to stay at his house. Anne saw the look on Ron's face, and packed an overnight bag, and got the kids loaded quickly in the truck. Ron was really glad he had his .45 on him right now. He got everyone into the house, and sent the kids down into the playroom. He gave Anne and Nancy the Reader's Digest version. Nancy actually felt better thinking someone had tried to kill them instead of almost having died in a random accident.

2 hours later, Gene called, they tested the other unit, and there was no malfunctions found. He was going to get hold of some people, and get to the bottom of this. Gene knew he was probably investigating an attempted murder, and he had a pretty good reason why. Northrop Grumman had over \$100 million reasons why, the US government wanted to buy some SuperGoose planes for the Coast Guard and Special Forces. It was a smaller 2-engine aircraft with only a pilot and co-pilot, and an amphibian, making it cheaper and better for Search and Rescue than a C-130, and could land on the ocean if the swell was small enough. With the addition of an air to air refueling probe, a KC-130 could act as a mother ship and flying gas station for a small fleet of SuperGoose aircraft that could search a much larger area faster than boats could. The original \$35 Million loss would now be more than \$100 Million, because there was no way the US government was going to pay more for a plane than the Canadians were. Gene wanted to get the autopilot controls to Elmendorf, where the technicians could read the codes line by line, and see if anyone tampered with the autopilot. He put the autopilot units in 2 sealed boxes, clearly labeled with the tail numbers of the aircraft involved, and flew them to Elmendorf using the 007. He told the pilot the nature of the flight, and if any aircraft flew too close, and appeared hostile, and he couldn't evade, he was to shoot it down. The pilot's pucker factor went through the roof, and he said "Yes Sir" even though Gene was in civilian clothes.

2 hours later they landed at Elmendorf, and he was greeted by the Base CO. Gene gave him a short briefing about what he thought happened, and the CO told him he had assigned his top aircraft avionics technicians to examine the autopilot. Gene flew back home, knowing the parts were in good hands. He called Bear and gave him a sitrep. The radar showed no aircraft in the air except their helicopter within a 200 mile range of Allakaket, so Bear stood down the security

alert, and called Ron and told him to Stand Down. Gene knew it would take a week or so for them to take the black box apart and run the code through the test equipment to do a line-by-line comparison. Since this was potential evidence in a criminal trial, a MP stood within sight of the black boxes at all times, and all chain-of-evidence paperwork was carried out. If someone tried to kill Ron, the CO of Elmendorf wanted the SOB's hide, and told them to make sure, and do a very thorough job so there would be no doubt the autopilot had been tampered with if it had in fact been tampered with. They also registered and photographed all the ID numbers off the case and the sub assemblies for later tracking in case this did turn out to be a criminal investigation.

Ron let out a sigh of relief when Bear called him and told him to Stand Down. By Stand Down, he didn't mean to go to Condition Green, more like yellow. A week later, the CO of Elmendorf called Gene in Allakaket. "Gene, my technician found 5 lines of code in the bad autopilot module that weren't in the other module, and they're both from the same lot and series, so it's not a board or component difference. Someone must have deliberately tampered with that box. They're looking up the codes now to see what command those 5 lines send where. Right now, I'd say we're conducting a Criminal Investigation, so I'm going to get an agent from the Anchorage FBI over here to observe."

"Good idea General. I'll get hold of a couple of friends of mine in the FBI, and get them up to speed on this investigation too. I'd lock down your avionics department until the FBI guy gets there, just to make sure." Gene hung up and made a few phone calls. Those calls started a cascade of activity, including hundreds of warrants they were going to serve on Northrop Grumman for the records and personnel involved with the avionics design, programming, installation, and assembly. Once the warrants were served, the Deputy Director of the FBI contacted the director of the FAA, and had them issue a Notice to Airmen telling them NOT to use the autopilot on the Grumman SuperGoose until further notice. The Los Angeles office of the FBI worked fast, and had the documents and personnel in custody with the exception of an aircraft mechanic who couldn't be located but they had a Federal BOLO out for him. Once they ran the trail of evidence, and found out that Ron Williams had personally cost Northrop Grumman over \$120 Million dollars in lost revenue they would have gotten by overcharging for the Grumman Goose, the list of suspects shortened dramatically. Several technicians were induced to turn State's evidence, and pointed the finger at Senior Management. There wasn't much of a paper trail, but they got enough to arrest and indict the CEO of Northrop Grumman for conspiracy to commit murder, and tampering with a commercial aircraft. He plead Not Guilty, and arranged bail of \$1 Million, and was released on bail.

1 week later, he died in a mysterious limo accident. The limousine he was driving in had stalled across 2 railroad tracks, and the oncoming trains couldn't stop in time, and shredded the limousine to the point that they had to use DNA records to positively ID the CEO. Ron read about it on the internet, and was pretty sure he threatened to squeal unless someone got him out of that jam, and they decided to take him out instead. One problem with high-powered "friends" is if you threaten them, they become high-powered enemies with the power to make you disappear. Northrop Grumman considered the matter closed, and shipped 2 new autopilot

units to Allakaket Airlines. Gene had the technician check them, and they were identical to the good unit, so Ron had them installed. The new CEO of Northrop Grumman disassociated himself and the company from his predecessor, and sent Ron a written apology, claiming of course that no one else at Northrop Grumman had any knowledge of his activities. With the death of the prime suspect, the Federal Prosecutor saw no reason why the technicians should get a free pass; and since the State of California wasn't a party to the immunity agreement, he sent his case documents to the State of California, which prosecuted the technicians for a whole raft of felonies, that put them behind bars for a long time. Gene considered the matter closed, and life slowly returned to normal at Allakaket Airlines.

With the conviction of the technicians involved, and the death of the prime suspect, the FAA realized that the single autopilot unit had been tampered with in a conspiracy to commit murder, and lifted the Notice to Airmen. Ron still didn't trust his autopilot, and never flew with it engaged again. He kept the aircraft, even though he was pretty sure the whole thing was a setup by the CEO to try and kill him. The next week, Ron, Nancy, Gene, Anne, and the kids flew to Bear's shooting range to get in some shooting. Jake was ready to shoot at the 600-yard line, so Ron uncased his M -25 and joined him on the 600-yard line. Nancy, Gene, Anne, and the 3 younger kids stayed on the 300-yard line. Bear and his sons came down to join them, and soon Gene and Bear were involved in some "friendly" competition. Bear didn't know that Anne had been working with Gene until it was too late, and Gene had won \$50.00 from Bear after beating his pants off at the 300-yard line. They were both shooting match-grade AR-15's with Simmons scopes to keep things equal. While they played, Anne asked her son if she could borrow his M -25 and try the 600-yard line. Ron agreed in a heartbeat. She got prone behind the rifle, and proceeded to put 5 shots into a 5-inch group. Jake looked up and groaned. His best group was 6 inches - he realized he needed to buckle down and concentrate, 600 yards was a LONG way! His next group reduced by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, and steadily crept down to the 5-inch mark over the afternoon. Ron was pleased that Jake was concentrating so hard. He could only stay in the Zone for a few seconds at a time, but he was getting better! When she was done shooting Ron's rifle, she convinced Gene to buy 2 more of them for them. Ron was glad he had his FFL dealer order a dozen rifles and scopes, since the one-upmanship had started. It might end with everyone equipped with the latest M - 200 Barrett rifle!

When they got home later that afternoon, there was a message on Ron's voicemail to call Sam and Ralph in Atlanta. He called them back, and Sam gave him the good news - they were expecting, and they wanted Ron and Nancy to be the godparents, since Doc and Bert were already the grandparents. Ron thanked and congratulated Sam and Ralph, and invited them up to the lodge for the summer, so they could spend a couple of weeks together. He suggested they ask Doc and Bert to come along as well, since he knew Doc loved to hunt Caribou. Sam said she'd call Doc, and call them back later. Ron called Bill and asked him what the hunting regulations were on private land. Bill told him that as long as he wasn't charging anyone for the right to hunt on his land, all they needed was their individual hunting licenses, and the appropriate tags. Ron asked him if he knew where to get some more 4x4 ATVs, and a bigger garage to house them. He had 3 units, and he needed 3 more with trailers. Bill said he'd get

back to him.

A couple of hours later, Doc called Ron back and said he wanted to take him up on his offer to spend 2 weeks hunting on their land. He'd love for Bert, Sam, and Ralph to be able to join them. Ron told Doc to get to Anchorage with their hunting licenses, tags and rifles, and he'd take care of the rest. He suggested that they can the caribou they shot and take it home with them, since they'd never be able to eat all of it, and he had plenty more caribou where that came from. Doc thought that was an excellent idea, and said he'd give him a week's notice to let them know they were ready to come up, but it would probably be later in the season, since he had surgeries scheduled for the next month or so. Ron thanked Doc, and said he'd see him later that season.

Two weeks later, Ron got an e-mail from Ronnie Barrett, asking if he could bring 6 people with him to go hunting at his lodge. Ron thought about it for a minute, and realized he had offered Ronnie the use of his lodge, so he said "Sure Come on up - so when do you think you'll be here?"

Ronnie replied: How about next Wednesday.

Ron replied that would be OK, and to plan on canning any Caribou they shot so they could take the meat home.

Ronnie thanked him, and said he appreciated his ideas, since he grew up in the country, and you never wasted anything.

Ron asked him to e-mail him their flight number, and arrival date and time, and he'd meet them in Anchorage. They needed to provide their own Alaska non-resident hunting licenses, and caribou tags, since they weren't a licensed hunting lodge. Ronnie said they'd take care of it, they were just glad that Ron had offered. The group was him, his wife, and 4 older teenage kids. Ron felt better, since Ronnie didn't invite 5 of his hunting buddies. Ron showed Nancy the note, and asked if she wanted to stay in Allakaket with the kids, or join them at the lodge. She said she'd rather stay in Allakaket since she didn't know Ronnie Barrett from Adam. Ron told her Doc, Bert, Sam and Ralph would be coming later that year, and she said she'd love to see them, and would make arrangements with Anne and Gene to take the kids for 2 weeks. Ron thought he could batch it for a couple of weeks, then remembered he needed to order several cases of quart Mason glass jars and lids to can all the Caribou they would need to can in the next couple of months. Ron called BA, who said he'd order double the number of jars and lids from their supplier, and they could pick them up in Anchorage later that week with their weekly shipment. BA said the best way to get an order that large back to Allakaket in 1 piece would be to send the Super Stallion to carry it as a sling load, since that was over 4,000 glass jars, and that took up a lot of room, but didn't weigh that much.

2 days later, The Super Stallion made a trip to Anchorage, and picked up a load of supplies that

was almost as big as the helicopter, but much lighter since it only weighed 10,000 pounds. They had packed the loads on pallets, and set the pallets into a huge Kevlar reinforced cargo net with the glass jars on top, and hooked it to the cargo hook of the Super Stallion. It took a while to get back, but it would have taken 10 trips with the Super Goose. They gently set the load down right next to the General Store, and flew off to land at the Heliport and refuel. Ron knew the pilot knew what he was doing when the shopkeeper called and told him that nothing was broken from the trip.

Ron remembered Ronnie Barrett would be flying into Anchorage in a few days, and decided to call BA and have him give Alaska Airlines a heads-up so Ronnie and his family would get the VIP treatment. He asked BA to ask them where he should meet them, at the VIP terminal, or if they had a spare slot for Allakaket Airlines if he could pull up to the gate, and have their baggage transferred directly to his aircraft. BA said he'd get back to him, and Ron checked on some other things. He got an E-mail from Ronnie with his flight number and arrival time, and he forwarded it to BA so he could make the arrangements with Alaska Airlines. Once that was taken care of, Ron asked Nancy if they wanted to go swimming, and use the shooting range. Nancy thought that was an excellent idea, since the kids were rambunctious and driving her nuts. They put their stuff together, and Ron warmed up the truck. They piled on in, and drove to the swimming pool, then once they were all settled down, Ron asked them if they wanted to go to the range. He hoped all the time shooting at 300 yards with scopes would pay off at the 100-yard range with open sighted .22 rifles.

When Jake and Josh pulled their first targets, Ron could see that it had, their groups were half the size they were last year. Jake shot a .65 inch group, and Josh shot a .75 inch group. Considering they were using William's peep sights instead of 10x scopes, that was a darned good group, and Ron told them so. Then Sarah came waltzing in with a .50 group and started rubbing it in. Jake said that he should have held her under longer at the pool! Ron laughed, thinking "Sibling Rivalry is Alive and well" then told Jake to be nicer to his sister, one day she'd bring home one of her friends, and he'd fall head over heels for her. Josh heard this and started making gagging noises. Jake was 14 going on 15, and starting to notice girls, but Josh was 13, and girls were still the enemy. Sarah, a very mature 12 year old, just shook her head, thinking "what a bunch of boys!"

Ron took them over to the pistol range, and everyone got quiet. Ron unloaded his carry ammo, loaded up some 230gr. FMJ practice ammo, and ran the target out to 25-yards. Ron felt anything closer was too easy. He holstered his weapon, made sure the kids were clear, and had Nancy take the club timer off to his left, and press the button when his hands were all the way up in the surrender position. As soon as he heard the beep, Ron swept his t-shirt back, drew from his IWB holster, and as he was drawing, once the barrel was pointed downrange, swept the safety off and took a firing grip on the gun. As soon as his Meprolight 3-dot sights were lined up on the target, just below the x-ring, Ron squeezed off his first shot, and as soon as the barrel was back down out of recoil, squeezed off the second round. He kept this up until the gun locked open. He took his ears off, and reeled in the target. All the rounds were in the kill zone

of the B-27, but he wanted to know how long it took to draw and fire 14 rounds from concealment. Ron was surprised to learn it had taken over 7 seconds to unload the magazine into the target. The good news was the first round went off just under 2 seconds after the beeper, which was pretty quick. Ron knew he could go much faster with an open carry IPSC rig, but the point of this exercise was speed and accuracy from concealment.

Nancy went next, and took 9 seconds, but her first round got off 1/10th of a second quicker than Ron's, and he checked the timer, and the main difference was her shot to shot interval was $\frac{1}{4}$ second longer than his, probably due to his stronger forearm muscles. Cutting and stacking all that wood must have been worth something after all. When she finished, the kids lined up to try the same drill, except Ron insisted all but Jake start from a low ready. Jake wanted to draw from his shoulder holster, since Ron had told him about the bear encounter and Sam. It took longer for Jake to draw from his shoulder holster with the 7" barrel on the suppressed 22/45, but his shot-to-shot interval was much quicker than his dad's. When Ron checked the target, he found out why. Jake's target looked like someone had blasted it with a shotgun full of 00 buck from 20 yards. Most of the rounds were in the kill zone, but not enough for the lack of stopping power the .22lr round had. Ron told Jake to do it again, and slow it down enough to ensure that all the rounds were in the kill zone. Jake's time went up by 2 seconds, taking 10 seconds to fire 15 rounds, but they were all in the kill zone.

Jake wanted to try again with his Colt Anaconda, but there were too many people around, and Ron didn't bring any practice ammo with him. He promised Jake he'd try and remember to bring it next time. Jake said that they could just stock it at the shooting range, since several people in Allakaket were carrying .44 Magnums, including the guides and pilots. Ron thought "Out of the mouths of babes..." and realized Jake was right, if they could practice with their carry guns, it might save a life in the bush. Besides, Ron hadn't practiced in a while. He called up the FFL dealer in town, and asked her to deliver a case of .44 Magnum practice rounds to the range, and bill Allakaket Airlines for it. She said "Yes Sir, I'll have the driver deliver it in 10 minutes." Ron knew they could wait for 10 minutes, so he went and talked to the range master, who assured him the backstop could handle .44 Magnum rounds, and he'd warn people that they were going to be making a lot of noise on the pistol range, so they could add earplugs under their muffs. Ron thought that was a good idea, and grabbed a box of earplugs, and passed them around, saying "If we're going to shoot those cannons indoors, they're going to get loud, and we need earplugs under our earmuffs to make sure you don't hurt your hearing."

10 minutes later the range master walked over with 4 boxes of .44 Magnum practice ammo. Ron bought it because it closely matched the spec of the ammo his Mom and Dad got from the gunsmith. It was a Cowboy action load that was loaded to 70% of SAMMI spec, and considered a light round. Ron went first, sent a target out to the 25-yard line, made sure everyone had eye and ear protection, and turned to the range master, who gave him a thumbs-up, dumped his carry ammo, put it in his pocket, and loaded the practice ammo. He shot from the low ready, and Nancy ran the timer, then she shot, then Jake. Ron was amazed, their targets looked identical, and Jake had shot faster than his mom, probably because she hadn't fired a .44

magnum in years. They kept shooting for an hour, and finally Ron called a halt because they had shot up all four boxes of ammo. By the end of the 4th box, you couldn't tell their targets apart, and Nancy was faster than Jake, but not by much. Ron was proud of his son, he had learned to shoot the big hand cannons when he was 14 too. He remembered why, and turned to Nancy while he cried. He got over it quickly when he remembered where he was, and they hurried out to the car. Jake asked his Mom why Dad was crying, and she said he was remembering what happened to Sam, his dog. Jake kind of understood, and walked over to Ron and gave him a big hug, saying "I love you Dad!" Ron lost it, and didn't care he was right on Main Street. Once they got control of their emotions, they piled into the truck, and drove home.

Jake and Josh took care of Starsky and Hutch, who had each gained about 5 pounds since they got them, and Ron had bought leashes for them so Jake and Josh could leash-train them when they took them outside to water the plants. Ron was impressed when he didn't see any accidents this time, but Josh and Jake didn't take any chances, and got Starsky and Hutch outside as quickly as they could. Nancy took out a pile of newspaper, and the gun cleaning kits, and they set up in the garage to clean their rifles and pistols. They field stripped the rifles, and cleaned out the chambers and barrel of their revolvers. Once they had cleaned them and lubricated them, they reassembled them, and put the rifles back in their cases. Ron and Jake reloaded their .44 Magnums and stuck them back in their holsters, then cleaned the 22/45's and reloaded them. While they were cleaning guns, Nancy made lasagna for dinner, and stuck her head in the garage to tell them dinner was ready.

Chapter 45 - Long-Range Hunting?

Ron flew to pick up Ronnie Barrett and his family, and was surprised when he was diverted to the Alaska Airlines VIP terminal until he saw Ronnie's Gulfstream parked in a VIP slot. Ron shut down and walked over to greet Ronnie. "I've got a favor to ask. I need a T&E session on a new rifle while we're here. The Pentagon came up with another idea after we re-designed the Bushmaster cannon, and asked us if we could up-scale the M-200 to fire the 25mm round that the Bushmaster did. I thought they had lost it until they explained that they wanted to have a couple hundred rifles in their inventory that could use explosive ammo to quietly destroy a high value target."

"Why not just use a missile or rocket?"

"I asked them that too, and they said that a rifle-launched 25mm HE round taking out a SCUD rocket or a fuel depot would have plausible deniability, but a missile or rocket left a visible trail, and too much debris. During Desert Storm, they used the M82a1 to punch holes in Scuds, so when they tried to launch, they blew up on the launch pad. Problem is the BMG-50 round isn't High Explosive - not enough room. The 25mm Bushmaster round is about the smallest round that carries a HE bullet. Could you imagine being over a mile away from an enemy fuel depot, and with 1 shot, turning the entire depot into a huge mushroom cloud? Anyway, I sent the idea to my engineers, and they said, "sure, we'll just build everything bigger!" so I brought the rifle with me, since I know Elmendorf has a 1,000 yard range."

"Ronnie, we've got a 1,000 yard range too at Alaska Survival Inc. Allakaket Airlines owns it, and my SEAL friend Bear runs it for me. We could test it there, it's remote, secure, and best of all, just a half-hour by air from my lodge." Just then, 2 huge baggage handlers showed up to transfer their baggage to Ron's plane. Ron offered Ronnie the right seat so they could talk on the way over. He got the rest of his family secured, then locked the door, and walked through the cockpit door, and sat in the right seat. Ron had started the pre-flight checklist, and taxied to the runway. Ronnie was watching him like a hawk, since his pilots never let him inside the cockpit. Ron called the tower and received permission to take off.. He asked Ronnie if he wanted a nice gentle take-off, or one that would make an e-ticket ride at Disneyland seem tame. Ronnie reminded him they had a million-dollar prototype in the cargo compartment, and Ron said "Guess that means nice and gentle?" and they both got a good laugh. 2 hours later, they landed at Bear's lake, and taxied up to the parking area. Ron called ahead, and Bear met them with an ATV and a trailer so they wouldn't have to haul the heavy case of ammo and the rifle to the range. Bear walked over to Ronnie Barrett and said "Sir, may I shake your hand. I wanted to tell you I know for a fact your rifles saved SEAL lives, because I was one of the ones saved." Ronnie gave Bear a "guy hug" and said that he loved hearing stuff like that, because the Liberals were always demonizing his rifles, and made him feel bad. Ronnie asked Bear if he wanted to watch the T&E session. Bear nodded his head vigorously, and climbed aboard his ATV to pull the trailer over to the 1,000 yard line. He even put the case up on his bench, and

almost herniated himself picking up the 25mm ammo case. "What do you have in here - Lead?"

When they opened the cases and the ammo box, Bear knew why it was so heavy. This rifle had been built to shoot the same round as the Bushmaster, and it was man-portable - barely! Ronnie told Ron that the gun had been test-fired for safety, but not accuracy, and the scope had been boresighted and adjusted for 1,000 yards. The huge Swarovski scope had a build-in BDC turret, but the lowest mark on it was 500 yards and it went out to 3500 yards. Ron noticed the scope was even bigger than the one mounted on the M -200. He asked Ronnie Barrett, who said that he hoped it could engage targets out to 2 miles away, so it had a huge 200mm objective, and a zoom eyepiece that went from 10-80 times magnification. Ron thought that at 80 times magnification, any object that was 2 miles away would look like it was about 100 feet away, but the field of view would like be looking through a soda straw. Ron and Bear set the rifle up, and Ron adjusted the stock to fit, then noticed the magazine only held 3 rounds, then he remembered how huge those rounds were!

Ron made sure the range was clear, and everyone was safely behind him, then he cycled the action, released the safety, and got behind the scope. The bipod/monopod setup meant that the sights were locked on the x-ring, so all he had to do was hold the gun still and touch the trigger. The recoil was stout, but no worse than the heaviest 12-gauge he had shot. Bear was looking through his spotting scope, and saw the first round go tearing through the x-ring. Ron steadied down, and fired the other 2 rounds, and they went through the x-ring as well. Even with the higher recoil, the gun was very accurate, and he shot an 8-inch group, which was twice the size of his best group with the M -200. Since they didn't have any target stands farther than 1,000 yards that was all the testing he could do. Ron told Ronnie the gun worked as well as the M - 200, but the recoil was twice as much. Ronnie told him the 25mm round had way more energy than the 50cal, and the level of recoil was expected. Frankly he was amazed that they could shoot that monster round out of a man-portable rifle. Ron told him that if it weren't for the suppressor, he couldn't, the recoil energy would probably break his shoulder. He explained to Ronnie that the muzzle blast of a BMG-50 or any round larger was a sizeable portion of the felt recoil. Ronnie said that's why his first rifle had a huge muzzle brake like a tank cannon. The suppressors were better at restricting muzzle blast, and the gun was much quieter too!

Ronnie said he had a couple of High explosive rounds on him if Bear had a suitable target. Bear pointed out a huge boulder that he said was about 2,000 yards away. Ron looked at it, and figured he could hit it, so he asked Ronnie to get the ammo, he felt like busting some rocks. Ronnie handed him 3 rounds, and Ron asked if he could use Bear's table, since he couldn't get the elevation off the ground to shoot that high. Bear cleared his spotting scope off the table, and they moved the rifle to the table, and Ron sat in Bear's chair. He raised the bipod as high as it would go, and lowered the monopod until the crosshairs of the scope were centered on the rock with the BDC set to 3,000 yards since it was uphill Ron knew it would shoot longer than it was. The rock was so huge that he could hit it regardless, but he wanted to turn that rock into dust. His first round hit dead center, but only blew some big pieces off the boulder. The next round hit close enough to the first round to blow a huge hole in the boulder, and knocked even more

pieces off. Ron knew he had 1 round left, and if he could hit the same spot, he might disintegrate that rock, so he really took his time, and the sight suddenly stayed rock still on the hole he had started, and he touched the trigger without even realizing it. The sight of the 10-ton boulder exploding was spectacular. Ronnie told him that was what the Pentagon wanted the gun to do, hit targets a couple of thousand yards away and blow them up. Ron said this rifle would do the trick. Ronnie thanked Ron for the test, and tried to hand him a check. Ron said "This one's on me!" and handed Ronnie Barrett his check back.

Bear helped them reload the SuperGoose, and they flew to Ron's lodge at HelpmeJack Lake. They got set up and ready for hunting. Ron showed Ronnie and his family the setup of the lodge. He liked the rustic atmosphere, and Ronnie's wife said the wood-fired stove was like the one she used to use when she was a kid in Tennessee, and brought back fond memories. Ron commented she might not be too fond of it once they got done canning 2 Caribou's worth of meat, and making sausage out of the scraps. Ronnie laughed, and said they did that all the time when they hunted at home in Murfreesboro. Ron explained your average male Caribou weighed about the same as a cow. Ronnie said "Holy Cow!" and they all got a good laugh. Ronnie commented on Ron's shoulder holster when they got indoors, and Ron hung it up on a peg. He told Ronnie they were in the middle of bear country and going anywhere unarmed was foolhardy. Then he told Ronnie not to shoot any wolves he saw since they were habituated to humans, and not a threat. Ronnie said "If you say so!" They made dinner and got to sleep early, since Ron wanted to be out hunting at first light.

The next morning, they were up at dawn, and were ready to go right after breakfast. Ron put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, then they walked out to the garage, and got out 6 ATVs. With 6 ATVs and 7 people, Ronnie and his wife doubled up with 2 of his smaller kids. Ron passed out helmets and goggles for everyone, and gave them the basic safety lecture, then they hitched trailers on 5 ATV's and headed out. 2 hours later, they drove up to the knoll on their side of the Caribou grounds. Ron quickly shut down, and put his finger to his lips, then whispered to Ronnie that the Caribou were on the other side. He wanted the shooters only, with their rifles loaded and safeties on, to follow him quietly and he'd show them where he wanted them to set up. Ron brought his .308 Browning A-bolt and a shooting pad, and they followed him single file up the narrow game trail. There were 5 shooters including him, and he got them safely spread around, and told them each to pick a separate bull. He told them NOT to shoot the prime bull, because he was the one that did all the breeding, and not to shoot any pregnant cows. He said they could tell because their bellies were bigger than the non-pregnant cows, and they kept to themselves. 2 minutes later they were ready to shoot, so they all put in earplugs and got ready to shoot. Ron stuck up his hand where they could see it, and started counting down by lowering fingers. When he got down to 3, he lowered his hand right to the trigger, and shot when he would have reached 0. 5 shots rang out, and 5 mature bulls dropped. Ron told them to put their safeties on, and hike carefully back to their ATV's and drive them over the hill. As they drove over the hill, the herd spooked.

Each one of the shooters drove his ATV with a trailer on it right to their bull, and started

skinning them. Once the skins were off, Ron showed them how to brain tan them in the field. Ronnie was amazed, he had heard something about Brain tanning, but never had a chance to try it. Ron told him "God gave each animal just enough brain to tan their hide with." Ronnie found that funny, and hoped no one would try to tan him, or they might not have enough brains for the job! Once Ron started cracking skulls and started the brain tanning process, Ronnie knew why they never did it in the South, it Stank - BAD! Ronnie was glad he ate a light breakfast, or he might have blown it all over the field. They got through the stinky part, and were glad to be able to wash the stinky gunk off their hands, and get down to butchering their animals. Ron handed out trash bags to put the meat in, and when they were finished, they packed everything up, and made it back to the lodge before dark. "I don't know how you do it year after year Ron, Brain tanning would just about make me buy my meat at the grocery store!"

"There's a lot of stuff you have to do for yourself out here, brain tanning skins is just one of the stinkier ones."

They put the meat in Ron's huge chest freezer, and laid the skins on top of the smokehouse roof to dry, and went inside for dinner.

The next morning, Ron broke out 2 cases of quart canning jars and lids, and the canning gear. He showed Ronnie's wife how to use it, then spread a piece of visqueen over the table, and a large polyethylene cutting board, and took out his Bowie knife to slice the meat into quart-sized pieces. Ronnie quipped "Now that's a knife!" and Ron quipped back "You just ain't Whistling Dixie there pardner!" Ronnie called a truce to the bad pun war, and asked how he could help. Ron said that he could help run jars over to his wife, and help her set up jars to cool. The kids kept themselves entertained in the lodge and out from underfoot. Ronnie was amazed at how many jars of meat they could make out of 5 caribou. Ron told them to keep all the jars, since his friend Doc Richards was coming out later, and he'd shoot 2 bulls when they were out there, and he'd have all the meat he'd need for the winter. They made sausage out of the leftovers, and when they were finished, Ron and Ronnie took the skins and drove them down to the lake to rinse them off.

"Ron, I don't know how to thank you - You barely know me, yet you opened your home to my family, and even took us hunting. I'd like to do this again sometime if we get the chance."

"Ronnie, I'd like that."

Once they had the skins thoroughly washed and dried, they rolled them back up, and drove to the lodge to hang the skins on the smokehouse roof to dry again. 2 days later, when the skins were dry, Ronnie said he had to get back, he couldn't take too much time away from his business. Ron said he understood, if he didn't have a Business Manager he trusted absolutely to run things for him, he'd be exhausted since they not only had the airlines, but the power, phone, and general store to run. Hearing this, Ronnie was incredulous, he thought he was busy just

running Barretts Firearms. He asked Ron how he did it. He said "I pray a lot!" Ronnie said "Amen Brother!" They packed everything up into the SuperGoose, and Ron flew them back to Anchorage. Ron parked next to Ronnie's G, and helped them load the plane, then they shook hands and Ronnie climbed aboard his jet to fly home. Once they were gone, Ron got back in the SuperGoose and flew home to Allakaket.

2 weeks later, Ron got an e-mail from Ronnie Barrett to expect a large package for him in Anchorage the next day. The message said it was a small token of thanks. Ron got a call from the UPS office in Anchorage the next day. There was a huge box from Barrett's Firearms inc. Ron hoped Ronnie didn't ship him a 25mm rifle, since he had no need for a gun that shot high-explosive rounds over a mile away. He told UPS he had a delivery run tomorrow, and to allow the delivery company Allakaket Airlines used pick it up. Ron flew the delivery run himself, since Steve was sick with the flu, and met the driver in Anchorage at 1000 sharp. Ron knew it wasn't another rifle by the size of the box, but figured it might be another case of BMG-50 Match ammo. He flew the entire load back to Allakaket since that's where it was going anyway. One of the baggage handlers helped him load the crate into the bed of his pickup. The suspense was killing him, and Ron opened the crate. Inside was a case of BMG-50 ammo, packed in ammo boxes, and a note.

Ron,

Thanks for everything. Here's a case of ammo to keep in practice in case we come up with any other bright ideas we need you to test. BTW: The Pentagon bought 100 of the 25mm Barretts Rifles for Special Forces.

Ronnie

Chapter 46 - Snipers in Training

Ron got a call from Gene the next day, and said that they needed to meet, and Bear, BA, and Bill needed to be there. They'd meet at the indoor shooting range to keep the kids occupied. Ron called BA and Bear, and they said they were on their way. Next he called Bill, and Bill was wondering what was up. They loaded the truck and drove to the range. Sally volunteered to stay with the kids at the range and keep them occupied.

Gene opened the meeting when everyone was there. "I've got some bad news for you, it seems some of our esteemed politicians have decided to spend us into the poorhouse, and are now looking for something to bail them out. Several of the more Socialist Liberals suggested nationalizing the Gold, Silver, Oil and Timber industries. So far the Conservatives are holding them off, but if the economy goes in the toilet, which it probably will shortly after they institute National Health Care, they might come after our Gold mine, and anything else not nailed down and take it by force. I've also heard rumblings from the rest of the world that if we default on our international loans, the foreigners holding the debt will seize "national assets" to pay for the debts. Right now, the FedGov is over \$3 Trillion in debt, and we're paying interest payments only on the debt. The good news is everyone in the know thinks they can string things out for 10-20 years, but the bad news is barring a major miracle, the US and probably the world economy is going in the toilet."

Ron said "So why you telling us? If we can't do anything about it happening, it's just 1 more thing to worry about!"

Bear answered for Gene, "Ah Grasshopper, what you fail to understand is being forewarned is to be forearmed! If we know it's going to happen in advance, like that fiasco in Saudi Arabia, we can take steps to lessen the impact. I can guarantee if TSHTF, Allakaket Airlines is going out of business for good. People will be too worried about basic survival to think about hunting and traveling. Second of all, we will find ourselves under attack, both from within and without. Our very own Government might send troops to confiscate everything we have, or another nation could try it. That leaves us between the proverbial rock and hard place. Ron - Gene, Bill, and I are probably going to be in rocking chairs by the time this happens, which leaves you and BA holding the bag so to speak, and most of our militia members are in their 40's now. We need to start training the kids. We don't need to turn them into Mujahadeen just yet, but the earlier we start the better. We've got enough hardware to repel an invasion, unless a major army attacks. Gene, maybe now would be a good time for one of those Cruise Missiles?"

"I keep telling you, you hairy overgrown Aquatic Freak, it's not time to "Shoot the Bastards" yet!" BA and Ron recognized the Claire Wolfe quote, and practically fell out of their chairs laughing, while Anne and Nancy looked at the men like they had lost it! When they finally came up for air, Bear said "OK, we need to make concrete contingency plans just in case this comes true. For now, we tell no one outside this group except Sally, we don't want to start a

panic.”

BA and Ron started talking, and asked Bear and Gene to put their heads together, and come up with the most likely scenarios and their best defense against them. Ron and BA would start socking away all their profits into stuff they'd need to survive if TSHTF. This would be just like the Saudi fiasco, only worse. Bill, BA, and Ron went over Allakaket Airlines' cash position, and tried to find holes in their preps. The only holes they could find were they were too dependent on goods manufactured elsewhere, and they couldn't make their own fossil fuels, except possibly biodiesel. They needed Jet Fuel and Avgas to keep flying. Jet fuel was kerosene based, and Avgas was really high octane gasoline. Ron said he'd check with the mechanic about alternative fuels like methanol to run instead of Avgas. BA showed Ron his Net Worth spreadsheet, and if they sold everything, Allakaket Airlines was worth over \$100 Million, including the Airline, Power company, General Store, Shooting Range, pool, and greenhouse/aquiculture. The mine itself was worth between \$20 and \$50 Million depending on proven reserves, and the price of gold at sale. Ron knew that selling out wasn't an option, because when the money ran out, they'd be at the mercy of whomever they sold out to. BA and Ron had over \$15 million each in the bank, between investments, cash, and other investments not tied to Allakaket Airlines. Ron suggested slowly maxing out their fuel storage capacity, especially AVGAS if it could be preserved and stored long term, since the smaller bush planes were more fuel economical. Ron knew the JP-5 that they got was a military fuel, and was already stabilized, but he wondered how long they could store it. They also needed to double or triple their storage of canned goods and staples, and invest in long-term storage techniques for staples, like 5-gallon buckets with lids, oxygen absorbers, etc.

The thing that really rattled Ron was the invasion scenario. They could lose 1/3 the population of Allakaket in a major attack, and they would run out of SAMs before the Chinese or Russians ran out of Air transport. Ron realized right then the best thing he could do was pray, and prepare for the things he COULD deal with.

Several weeks later, Doc Richards sent Ron an E-mail, asking if it were OK for them to come up and spend a week or two at their lodge. Ron called Anne and asked if they could watch the kids. Anne suggested buying a wall tent, and letting the kids sleep outside, since it was warm enough, and Starsky and Hutch were big enough to warn them of any predators. Ron said he wasn't too sure about that idea, since either he or Nancy would have to join them, or Nancy would be out there every 5 minutes making sure they hadn't been eaten by a wild animal. Anne scolded her son, and said “Now Ron, Nancy's not that overprotective!”

“Compared to you mom?”

“Ron that was a cheap shot!”

“Sorry Mom, just call them as I see them!”

“Oh, really, I seem to remember a 14-year old boy that scared him mother half to death when

her brother's best friend told her they nearly died in a plane crash!"

"Sorry Mom, I guess I wasn't all that easy to raise."

"You were a good boy, you just scared me half to death on occasion!"

"Thanks Mom, I guess I shouldn't be so hard on Nancy, after all neither Jake nor Josh have expressed an interest in learning how to fly!"

"So far - just wait until they realize that anyone without a pilot's license either has to bum a ride, or pay someone to fly them anywhere they wanted to go in Alaska."

"Ok Mom, I'll talk it over with Nancy. Bye, love you Mom!"

"Love you too son - take care!"

Ron walked into the living room and asked Nancy what they should do. Nancy agreed with her mom, and said that she wouldn't be out every 5 minutes to check on them, maybe every hour or so! Ron walked down to the den, and told the kids the good news. Jake was jazzed because he liked hunting. Josh, Sarah, and David were OK with it, but would rather stay home with their toys. Ron said that Starsky and Hutch were coming too, and that got Josh's vote. Ron realized they would all need new sleeping bags, since they grew enough since the last time they were hunting that they probably didn't fit into their bags anymore. Ron called the General Store, and she said they had a bunch of child and teenage sized sleeping bags, and she'd put 4 aside that should fit Ron's kids. He asked her if they had a good tent, and she said she'd add one to the list. Ron remembered air mattresses, and she recommended the self-inflating type, or she could guarantee several punctured air mattresses, since kids were hard on stuff. Ron thought the storekeeper knew her stuff, and thanked her. Nancy finished dinner, and they sat down together. Jake and Josh were both eating a second helping, but Sarah and David weren't such chow hounds yet. Sarah was watching her figure, and David hadn't hit his growth spurt. Ron wondered why a 12-year old girl in the middle of nowhere would watch her figure. Ron didn't know what to say, and hoped Nancy would talk to Sarah about eating sensibly. The twiggy look was out. When they finished dinner, Ron took Nancy aside and asked her. "I make sure Sarah's eating OK, it's just her friends are feeding her all this BS from the teen mags that are still glorifying the skinny teen image. I'm pretty sure it's a backlash against the rampant obesity of the 90's couch potatoes, which was probably a backlash against the 80's soccer kid movement."

"Can we get her some better role models, like some teenage magazines written for Christian teens, that emphasize positive things instead of how skinny you are, and how far your pants fall off your hips? Or which parts of your anatomy are the latest fads to get pierced?"

"OK Ron, you made your point - I'll talk to her, and we'll get her some better magazines to

read, maybe she'll hand them out to her friends, and change a couple of viewpoints."

"Thanks Nancy, I know it's not easy raising teenagers this day and age. We should be thankful we live here in the middle of nowhere, otherwise, their friends would be in gangs, and doing drugs. At least we don't have that to worry about!"

Ron picked up the camping gear the next morning, and got everything organized. Nancy said she should stay with the kids in the cabin while Ron picked Doc and his family up in Anchorage. Ron thought that was a good idea, because judging from last time, Nancy would want to pack the plane full of stuff for a 2-week trip. Luckily Jake and Josh were big enough to handle packing the plane. Ron packed his Barretts M -200 and an ammo can full of ammo just in case one of them wanted to try shooting it. Jake packed both M-25's, and the other kids packed their AR-15's, and Ron made sure there was enough ammo for each of the rifles. They took off shortly after they were loaded, and Ron dropped Nancy and the kids off at the lodge. Once the plane was unloaded, he turned and taxied back to the lake, and flew to Anchorage just in time to pick Doc and his family up. Once their baggage was loaded, he taxied to the fuel pumps, filled all his tanks, and flew back to the lodge. Sam positively glowed, and Ralph was acting like the proud papa. Bert and Doc were talking about being grandparents, and how badly they were going to spoil the grandkids. Doc was amazed when he saw how small HelpmeJack Lake was. Ron told him not to worry, the new SuperGoose could float on in to this lake like a Cessna, and then he'd reverse the props, and they'd stop like he'd thrown out an anchor. True to his word, they floated in like they were on a parachute, and Ron stopped with half the lake remaining, and taxied to the lodge. Once they were stopped, Ron opened the doors and helped everyone out, then the kids and the dogs ran to greet everyone followed by Nancy. She gave Sam a girl hug, and told her "congratulations Mom, so when's the baby due?" Sam was only in her 3rd month, and wanted to go hunting. Her OBGYN didn't see any problems, since she was only firing one shot. Nancy showed them the lodge, and their rooms. Doc asked "where are the kids sleeping?"

Ron said he was going to pitch a tent out front, since they were young enough to enjoy sleeping on the ground. Doc had to agree with that - if he didn't sleep in a comfortable bed, he didn't sleep at all! Ron told him they were all set up to can all the Caribou meat they shot, since they didn't believe in trophy hunting, and the best way to preserve the meat was to can it. Bert volunteered to help Nancy, she was an old pro at canning, since they used to have a garden and orchard at their house. Ralph and Sam wanted to ask Ron about the boxes they saw strapped to the bulkheads of the aircraft. Ron said he was a State Licensed Paramedic, and the Super Goose was configured for SAR and Medevac including a full paramedic kit, onboard liquid oxygen, and a radio to talk to the hospital while in route. He told them the Hospital bought 2 SuperGoose aircraft, and the state of Alaska had a dozen for SAR and Medevac stationed throughout the state. All Allakaket Airlines pilots were trained paramedics, and all the small commercial pilots had to be trained to EMT II, and the guides had to be trained to First Responder, but most opted for EMT I since the state paid for the training and the gear. Ralph said that was a neat setup. Ron told them the hunting trip would only take a day, since they

drove ATVs out to the Caribou grounds, and brought the meat home using the trailers attached to the ATV's. Ralph thought that was a good idea, since Doc and Bert were getting up in years, and couldn't handle a multi-day trip. That was the main reason Doc hadn't gone hunting for the last couple of years, he couldn't sleep unless he was in a comfortable bed. Ron said that if they wanted to, Bear had a Survival School half an hour away with a 1,000 yard range, and they could try their hand at long-range shooting. Ralph said the farthest he'd ever shot was 300 yards with a Bushmaster HBAR AR-15 and a scope. Ron said they had 4 of those with Simmons Scopes, and 2 M -25 M-1a's with high-powered scopes, or if they really wanted to go long, he brought his Barrett's M -200 that fired a BMG-50 round over 1,000 yards, and had a Swarovski scope to match. Ralph definitely wanted to try that, but Sam didn't want to risk her pregnancy. Ron thought that was smart, and if she wanted to, she could shoot the AR-15's.

The next morning, they got on the 6 ATV's. Ron, Nancy, Jake, Doc, Sam, and Ralph were all going hunting. Doc had taken 3 7mm Magnums out of his gun closet, and sent them to the gunsmiths to be checked over, and boresighted. Ron had told him to zero the rifles for 200 yards, since 99% of their shots were between 150 and 250 yards away, and 50 yards was only a $\frac{1}{2}$ " difference in point of impact. Ron made sure they had earplugs and eye protection before they left, and before they got on the ATVs, everyone put on helmets and goggles. They stopped at the knoll 2 hours after they left the cabin, and carried their rifles and shooting pads up the trail. Ron got everyone set up, and got their earplugs in. They had already selected which animal they were going to shoot. With Ron, Nancy, and Jake shooting, they'd have plenty of meat for the winter, even with Jake and Josh eating like pigs. Ron didn't bother counting down this time, and when his crosshairs centered on the neck of the bull he wanted, he squeezed his trigger. He heard 5 more closely spaced loud booms, and 6 bulls were down and not moving. Ron had them get up, put the safeties on their guns, and hike back to the ATVs. When they drove into the clearing, the herd stampeded. They all drove up to the caribou they shot, and Ron, Nancy, Jake and Sam made quick work of skinning their bulls. Sam was quick because it smelled, and since she was a surgeon, she really knew how to use a knife. Doc knew what he was doing, but wasn't in a hurry, and Ralph didn't have a clue. As soon as Sam was finished with hers, she showed her husband how to skin a caribou, and he caught on quickly. Ron volunteered to brain tan the hides while they butchered the carcasses. Nancy and Sam took him up in a heartbeat. Jake wanted to do his own, but when he got a whiff of the brain of his dad's caribou, he decided to let Dad do them all.

Sam was the quickest at butchering, followed by Nancy and Jake. Again Doc wasn't in a hurry, and Ralph was doing his best. Ron had all the skins brain tanned, and they were through butchering the meat well before evening, so they drove home after Nancy insisted her husband take a bath in the pond and get the stench off! They made it home with an hour to spare, and Bert said she had fun watching the kids. The next day they canned the meat and made sausage out of the leftovers. Just like she said, Bert was an old pro, and showed Nancy a couple of tricks that made it go faster. They had everything canned before dinner, and were finished with the sausage before bed time. Ron went out to check on the kids, and they were laying in their sleeping bags with Starsky and Hutch pulling guard duty. He went back in the house and told

Nancy everything was fine. He hoped he would get lucky, but Nancy told him he still smelled like Caribou brains, and wasn't getting anywhere near her!

The next morning Ron volunteered to kill 2 birds with 1 stone, and wash the skins, and himself. Nancy handed him a bar of pine soap, and told him to use a lot of it! He came back smelling like a pine tree, but Nancy said it beat smelling like the inside of a caribou's skull. After breakfast, Ron asked them if they wanted to go shooting at Bear's. Everyone wanted to go, so Ron flew them over in 2 trips, since the plane only had 8 passenger seats, and Ron's 6 plus Doc's 6 equaled 12! Ralph was having fun shooting the Barretts on the 1000 yard line, when he heard a scream, and rushed over to see his Mother in Law collapsed, and Sam working on her. She yelled to Ralph "It's her heart, we need to start CPR and evacuate her to a hospital ASAP. Ron ran to the SuperGoose, grabbed his paramedic kit, and ran back. He took out his Cellular phone, and Ralph took charge of her, since he was an ER doc, and knew exactly what to do. Ron called Doc Miller told him what happened, and that she was in the care of 2 Atlanta MD's, and her husband was a neurosurgeon. Doc Miller told them to transport ASAP. Ron told them he was going to get the stretcher, and get the plane set up to transport her to Anchorage.

15 minutes later, they were ready to fly her to Anchorage, and they carried her to the plane. Bear said he'd stay with the kids so Nancy could fly right seat, in case they had to fly somewhere after dark. Ron broke all speed rules getting the plane airborne, and set the plane for maximum speed to Anchorage. While he flew the plane, Nancy worked the radio, and got emergency clearance to land right at Alaska Regional Hospital. Doc came forward, and gave them the good news that Bert was stable. Ron flew the entire route at 330 knots, and landed at 120 knots without deploying the flaps, then reversed the props and applied the brakes so they stopped right out in front of their door. Ron did an emergency shut down to get the props slowed, and the attendants took Bert an loaded her on a gurney. "We've got her Ma'am" they told Sam, who was still working on her mom when they were trying to get her out of the plane. Once they were all out, Sam grabbed Ralph and hugged the stuffing out of him and cried. When she regained her composure, they walked into the ER entrance. Steve, the Director of Emergency Services, greeted them at the door. "She's going to be fine, but she needs bypass surgery. You guys did an amazing job getting her here in as good a shape as you did."

Ralph introduced himself as Dr. Raphael Lacombe, Chief ER Resident at Granger Memorial, then Sam introduced herself as Samantha Lacombe, Emergency Surgical Resident at Granger. Doc Richards introduced himself as a Professor of Neurosurgery at UNC Chapel Hill, and the husband of the patient, Bert Richards. Steve said "No wonder she made it, two ER docs and a Neurosurgeon in the same family." Ralph said that they would have been up the creek without a Lear Jet if it weren't for Ron's State Paramedic kit, which had all the drugs they needed to give her to stabilize her heart. Steve was amazed, he never thought that those kits would come in so handy. He realized that the Paramedic Kit, and the Medevac capabilities of the SuperGoose equaled or exceeded Anchorage's ALS ambulances. Plus the fact that this ambulance could fly faster than 300 knots made it a very fast ambulance. Steve told Ralph and Sam they were really short of trained ER Docs and especially ER surgeons, and he could offer

them a job in Alaska paying 50% more than they made in Atlanta any time they wanted to move. Ralph said they'd have to think about it, right now they had more important things on their minds. Steve apologized and said "of course. I'll have the Chief Resident give you an update as soon as possible."

15 minutes later, the Chief Resident and the head of Cardiac Surgery met the three of them. They addressed the 3 visiting doctors as Dr. so and so, and showed them a lot of professional courtesy, including letting them review Bert's charts, EKG, and ECG results. Ralph and Sam agreed that she needed an immediate bypass, and she was next for the OR, and they needed to leave and scrub up. Ralph and Sam knew better than to ask to scrub in, since having relatives working on relatives could cause problems. Doc asked if anyone had gone an EEG, but the Chief said that unless she lost consciousness, there was no point. Doc insisted, saying that he thought she might have thrown a clot, which caused the heart attack in the first place. The "Oh Shit" look on the Chief's face said it all, and he grabbed his radio, and ordered a whole bunch of tests STAT to make sure she wouldn't stroke out on the table. Half an hour later, a much relieved Chief came back to report Bert's EEG was normal, and there was no sign of blood clots or pre-stroke conditions, so they were going to do the surgery ASAP.

2 hours later, the Chief came into the Chapel to report that Bert came through the surgery with flying colors, and could go home in a week after she recovered from surgery. Doc huddled up with Ralph and Sam, and said they needed to get back to work, and he'd stay here with Bert. Doc turned to Ron and asked him if he could fly Sam and Ralph back to the lodge to get their stuff, and then fly them to Anchorage so they could catch a flight tomorrow. Ron gave Doc a hug, and said he'd take care of Sam and Ralph, and he'd be praying for Doc and Bert. Doc gave Ron a hug back and said "I'm sorry I forgot to thank you - you saved my wife's life."

"Doc, your daughter and Son in law did all the work, I just flew the plane. Besides, talk about strange coincidences, I guess you never thought that the gear you insisted the state of Alaska include in their kits would save your wife's life!"

Doc shook his head in amazement, then asked Ron to take care of Sam and Ralph. Ron said he could count on him, then Doc turned back into the Chapel to be alone and pray. Sam and Ralph reluctantly came with Ron since they realized the hospital would use any excuse they could get to terminate or suspend them. On the way out, they ran into Steve again, and Ralph asked him point blank if they had any problem with doctors being armed on Hospital property. Steve said the Administration had zero problems with armed docs, and half the staff had CCW's, but it wasn't because they needed them. Even a big town like Anchorage had 1/10 the crime rate of Atlanta.

Ralph said "Were you serious about giving us a 50% raise?"

"Well, how much were they paying you?"

Ron grabbed a pad and paper, and wrote two figures.

Steve said "I could easily double those!"

Ralph said he was definitely interested, and said he'd have to talk to Sam about it. Steve handed them his card, and said that he was in charge of the entire Emergency Services program for the hospital, and the county, and he had the authority to hire them. He said if they're backgrounds checked out, he could hire them on the spot! Ralph was real tempted, but said he'd have to talk to Sam, and then mentioned they weren't scheduled to fly to Atlanta until tomorrow. Steve pulled out the stops, and said that if they'd stop by and talk to him tomorrow, if they didn't decide to move, he'd pay their airfare back to Atlanta. If they stayed, he'd pay up to \$10 Thousand in moving expenses. Ralph shook Steve's hand, and asked him what time tomorrow? Steve said he got in at 0830, so any time after 0900 would be fine. Ralph said he'd see them at 0900 tomorrow, then looked to Ron, who was nodding OK. Steve shook their hands, and they turned to walk out to the plane.

The first thing out of Sam's mouth was "Why didn't you take it?"

"I thought you liked the south?"

"I did - when I was young, now it's just another Big Liberal Slime pit!"

Ron spoke up "Guys, I've got a news flash, keep this under your hats, but several economists were predicting the collapse of the US economy in the next 10-20 years. The last place you'd want to be would be in a big Southern City, the Blacks would riot in a heartbeat as soon as the welfare checks stopped."

"That's exactly what the guy Bear sent us to told us, we were right in the middle of Ground Zero if TSHTF living in Atlanta. I'm seriously thinking walking back in there and telling Steve we'll take the jobs!"

"So what you waiting for? Ron and Nancy are only a couple of hours away by air, and he owns the airline. Doc and Bert are almost twice as far away, and they might not live much longer."

The 4 of them turned around, and walked back inside to find Steve. Ralph talked to Steve, who said they had an opening for a new Chief Resident for Emergency Medicine, and they needed a new Staff Emergency Surgeon. He had checked with Granger, and they verified all their qualifications, and the fact that Sam had successfully completed her residency. Since she would now be Staff, he could bump her salary by 30% over what he quoted. Ralph asked if they could have a week or two to pack, and ship their stuff to Anchorage. Steve said they could have two weeks, and he'd pay for them to ship their stuff to Anchorage, up to \$10,000. He knew of a nice apartment complex close to the hospital that catered to doctors, and waived the first and last requirement. They had a nice 2 bedroom/2 bath apartment for rent cheap. Ralph asked

where he signed up. Steve said "You just did." He handed Ralph 2 employment contracts for their signature, listing the salaries Steve had mentioned, plus free medical and dental for the entire family, a month paid vacation to start, and profit sharing that was deposited into their 401K accounts, instead of state retirement, since they were a private hospital. Ralph read and signed his contract, then Sam signed, and they gave each other a big hug. Steve shook their hands and welcomed them to the hospital. The 4 of them walked out of Steve's office, and ran into Doc. Ralph gave him the good news. Doc didn't look so hot, and Ron was worried something was wrong with him. They sat down, and Ron got a glass of water. Doc finally said "she's gone!" Sam couldn't believe her ears, didn't want to believe it, but Doc's face said it all.

"She never woke up from the anesthesia. They were transferring her from the recovery room to ICU when she coded. It was the best way for her to go, she never felt a thing." Sam suggested they adjourn to the Chapel, and they all helped Doc walk.

Chapter 47 - Photographs and Memories

After a long prayer session in the Chapel, Doc announced that since Ralph and Sam were relocating to Alaska, he wanted to move to Allakaket. Ron said “Are you sure?”

“Ron, I never told anyone this, but the only reason I stayed there so long was Bert was in love with the big huge Southern Mansion. When we found out we couldn’t have kids, it devastated Bert, and she withdrew into herself and the house, which came to represent everything she had lost. I had several offers from other Medical Schools, but Bert always wanted to stay there. She’d only leave the house to go to church or dinner. After 30 years as a Neurosurgeon, I needed to work like you needed 2 heads, but staying there was driving me stir-crazy. I had to get out and do something. Someone at the school suggested consulting on risky or dangerous surgeries. I tried it, and I was good at it. I was amazed at how much hospitals would pay to consult on 1 surgery. I did 5-10 consults per year, and doubled my savings each year. The house sits on 100 acres of prime real estate, and developers have been offering anywhere from \$10-50 Million to me to sell, but we never would. I loved Bert, and I’ll miss her, but it’s time for me to move on.”

“Doc, if you want, I’ll fly back to Chapel Hill and help you close up the house, box up and ship anything you want, and help you sell the property.”

“Thanks Ron, I could use the company right now.”

Sam asked Doc “What are we going to do about a funeral?”

“Bert hated them, so she told me not to have one for her, so I hope she won’t be upset since we went into the chapel and prayed for her and us.”

“Doc, none of my relatives had funerals either and they’re all buried next to the lodge. So I know how she feels.”

“Bert wanted a direct cremation, I’ve got to make the arrangements with a local funeral home, and so if you excuse me, I’ll be right back.”

A hospital social worker walked up to Doc, and he told her Bert’s wishes, and she said she could make the arrangements, and deliver a nice ceramic urn with her ashes to him sometime in the next couple of days. Doc motioned to Ron, and asked him to give her a delivery address in Allakaket for Bert’s ashes. Ron gave her the General Delivery address in Allakaket, and she thanked him. Doc turned around and they walked out of the hospital, and got in the SuperGoose and left for Bear’s shooting range, where they left the kids. Sam and Ralph sat on either side of Doc on the way home, and Sam was holding Doc’s hand. “Doc, I’m sad that Bert never lived to see her grandchildren.”

"I'm sure she'll be smiling down from heaven when you give birth to your first son!"

Sam thought "How'd he know, I just found out last week that we were having a boy?"

Sam told him he was right, and they wanted to name their son Bert, in honor of Bert Richards.

Doc grinned, and said "Just as long as you don't name the next one Ernie!"

Sam didn't get it - she wasn't raised with TV, but Ralph got it, and if he wasn't belted into his seat, he would have been rolling in the aisles. When he could finally speak coherently he said "Doc, I don't know who writes your material, but he's good - maybe you should be a comedian!" Ralph explained the Sesame Street joke to Sam, who chuckled, but didn't find it as hysterically funny as Ralph did. They landed at Bear's lake an hour later, Ron had already given Bear a heads-up, so he could prepare the kids for bad news. Bear decided to break it to them, since they had just met Bert, and it would give them time to deal with it, instead of putting Doc through it all over again. They landed and taxied right up to the parking spot. As soon as they got down, Jake, Josh, Sarah and David ran to Doc and gave him a big hug. Doc felt like a grandfather for the first time in his life, and cried happy tears, then knelt down, and said that he was OK; he knew Bert was in Heaven with Jesus. Sarah wouldn't let go, so Doc gave her an extra hug, and then let her go. She ran back to her brothers, and Ron told them to pack up and get ready to go back to the lodge. Nancy stayed with her kids, and Ron flew Doc, Ralph and Samantha back to the lodge, then turned around and picked up Nancy and the kids. It was getting dark by the time he got to the lake, but not dark enough that he couldn't see. He turned on the landing lights to give him a better idea of where the surface of the lake was, and performed a very good landing, considering it was almost an hour past sunset. The way the sun set in Alaska during the summer meant that it really didn't get dark out. They weren't far enough North to have 24-hour sunlight during the winter, but it meant that it didn't get pitch dark either as it did further south. The landing light really helped, and Ron was glad he had it installed, even though this was the first time he had used it with the SuperGoose. While she was waiting for Ron to get back with his family, Sam had made dinner, so Nancy was thankful, since she was drained.

The next day, Ron loaded his family into the SuperGoose and flew them back to Allakaket, packed a bag with a couple of weeks of clothes, including his "shaving kit" survival kit, packed his P-14 and 5 magazines, left the shoulder holster and fanny pack on, but left room for them in his bag, kissed Nancy and gave the kids a hug, then drove back to the airport. His SuperGoose was fueled and idling when he got there, so he stowed his baggage, and flew to the lodge. When he got there, Doc said they were going to leave everything here they didn't need, since Ralph and Sam were coming back in 2 weeks or less, and he'd be back as soon as he packed up and sold his house. They all had a carry-on and a checked bag. Ron had already made arrangements with the airlines to bump all 3 of their tickets to First Class and seat them next to him. Ralph and Sam had left their Suburban at Doc's house, so they would be flying together to North Carolina. Ron parked the SuperGoose at Alaska Airlines VIP terminal, and a baggage

handler loaded their baggage in the back of the truck, and said he'd make sure it got aboard their flight, handed them 3 boarding passes. Doc noticed they were First Class, with VIP codes. He thought "RHIP" and the driver dropped them off right at their gate.

They climbed the stairs to the terminal, and he let them through the security gate. They presented their boarding passes, and the gate worker remembered them from when Ron asked her to intercept his bags, and made sure they were checked through to Delta in Seattle. She handed them their Delta boarding passes, and had written the gate number and flight number on a post-it. They were seated in First Class with Doc and Ron taking up one row, with Sam and Ralph behind them. Ron took out his Tom Clancy book for the long flight, and Doc was soon asleep. They landed in Seattle a couple of hours later, and they had to walk to the other side of the concourse to get to the Delta side of the SeaTac terminal. Ron suggested to Ralph that they get out their CCW's and follow his lead. They walked up to the Security Gate, and Ron showed his CCW while he was holding Doc by the elbow, and Ralph and Sam flashed their CCWs as well, and they were escorted through Security without stopping. Doc was amazed, and asked Ron how he did that. "Doc, I just took advantage of a weakness in their security. The TSA goons aren't the brightest crayons in the box, and when they saw the 3 of us with Federal CCW's and as bad as you look, they just assumed you were in our custody and let us all through."

"You SOB; they probably thought I was a criminal!"

"Hey, would you rather deal with the idiots and get harassed and patted down, or cruise through security with us? I'm sure you'll never see those jokers again!"

"I know you've got a Federal CCW, but when did Ralph and Sam get one?"

Ralph reminded Doc about that incident in the hospital parking lot. He said that Bear had made arrangements through a friend of his General Shepard to get both of them Federal CCW's, which was a good thing, because it prevented that liberal weasel of a DA from prosecuting them for unauthorized carry.

"You mean you two are carrying guns right now?"

"Doc, it's just like the American Express Card, we don't leave home without them, they've come in handy more than once since then."

Doc realized he needed a major attitude adjustment, he still believed all the Liberal BS the media had been feeding him about guns, and here he had been given several examples of evidence to the contrary. Armed private citizens didn't CAUSE crime, they Prevented it! That thought shook him to the core, and he wondered what else the media had been lying about. They boarded the Delta flight to North Carolina, and 6 hours later, they were met at the baggage pickup by Nelson. He was confused by the absence of Bert, or Mrs. Richards, as he knew her.

Doc told him she died in Alaska, and he came back to pack up the house, sell it, and move to Alaska. Nelson's usual impassive demeanor broke down. "I'm deeply sorry for your loss sir; I really liked you and Mrs. Richards."

"Thank you Nelson. Don't worry; I'll take care of you. You've been a loyal servant all these years, and I've had a trust fund already set aside for your retirement. Any ideas about what or where you want to go?"

"Really sir, I've no where to go, and I'm too young to retire. I imagine you won't need a Chauffeur in Allakaket, but perhaps a butler or manservant?"

"No, but I could use a friend and a roommate. Ron could arrange a house that would be big enough for the two of us, and we could both retire and spend our time fishing and hunting."

"If you say so sir!"

"Nelson, please stop the subservient stuff, Bert might have lapped that up like a cat laps cream, but I bugs the heck out of me - My name's Doc, ok Nelson?"

"Yes sir Doc."

"Well that's a start. OK, Nelson, we need a lift back to the mansion, and then if you could help Ron pack up my personal clothes, my library, and gun collection and help him ship them to Alaska, I'd appreciate it. Make sure you include all your personal affects as well."

"Yes sir Doc, it would be my pleasure."

"Nelson, you're doing it again."

"Sorry sir, old habits die hard."

"Well I hope these subservient ways of yours die fast!"

Nelson swallowed hard, and opened the limousine. He'd miss driving the big beautiful Lincoln Continental Limousine. He wondered what it was like to be retired. He realized he'd rather be with Doc then by himself in some retirement community in Miami Florida. Besides Doc might need him anyway, and he'd grown attached to Bert and Doc. He'd known no other life since his adulthood, it was what he was. He got them all loaded, and realized that everyone except Doc was packing heat. He had a friend that was a tailor, and it irked him when he spotted sloppy tailoring that allowed a gun to show when you wore a suit, and he told Nelson that none of his customers who routinely went armed had ever been made by a bulge showing in their suit jacket. Nelson closed the doors, and realized he had some adjusting to do. Where he was going, probably everyone was armed either openly or concealed. He drove to the old mansion,

and realized he wouldn't be seeing this sight much longer; the view from the driveway was stunning. He parked out front, and helped everyone out, and parked out back after removing their luggage.

Ralph and Sam were in a hurry to get back to Atlanta and start packing. Ron suggested selling their Suburban since it would cost a fortune to ship, and to buy a diesel-powered 4wd pickup or SUV when they got there. Ron would be surprised to find out what they were shipping. They had several boxes full of Survival Gear and stuff. Ron suggested not leaving a forwarding address, unless it was to a local Mailboxes Etc. that they paid to forward their mail for 90 days, and then canceled their contract. Ralph thought that was an excellent idea. Hopefully if anyone came looking for them based on the registration of their weapons, they'd run up against a brick wall when the Mailboxes place didn't have a current address on them either. If they used their Atlanta address to open the account, and left a deposit to forward their mail, they'd lose track of them after their contract expired. Since they were doctors, and easy to find through the Medical registry, it was a long shot, but worth the effort in case it worked. They drove back to Atlanta, gave notice at the hospital, and gave George and their group the bad news. George was glad they were getting out of Atlanta and going some place relatively safe, but frustrated since now he had to locate another surgeon and ER doc. The rest of their friends were pretty useless, and had failed miserably in the time since they went on vacation. It seemed if Ralph, Sam or George wasn't constantly motivating them, they fell right back into their old Sheeple thought patterns. As soon as Ralph and Sam were gone, he'd give the Sheeple the bad news - he figured two-thirds of them wouldn't care one way or another, and maybe 1 or two might survive the coming economic and political upheaval that he was hearing about.

Ralph sent their friends an e-mail saying they had found new jobs and were moving effective immediately, but left no forwarding address just like George suggested. They unplugged and boxed up the computer, and cancelled all their utility services. It took 2 days of hard packing to pack everything, only to discover that shipping stuff to Alaska was \$++. Some of the stuff would have to donate or sell, since it cost more to ship it than it was worth. Ralph remembered Steve said the hospital would pay \$10K of moving expenses, and decided that anything over that amount would be sold or donated to charity. They had a huge moving sale, and made almost 3 thousand dollars by selling their furniture and household stuff. The only things they shipped were their clothes, survival gear, medical books, and their CDs and Videos. The stereo would have to go, as well as the TV, since it would cost more to ship than it was worth. George bought their Suburban for the asking price when Ralph showed him the hidden features. He paid Ralph for the gear he had in it, instead of having him take it out and ship or sell it to someone else. George knew someone who could really use a vehicle set up like that, and got hold of them and sold it that day for the equivalent value in gold. George did as little as possible above board. The new owner would never register the vehicle, because he lived so far away from civilization that a bill of sale was all that they needed, so George never transferred the title to his name, or paid any of the fees demanded by the state. For all intents and purposes, the vehicle disappeared into a black hole.

Ralph took a cab to a local internet café, and located several 4x4 Chevy Suburbans with the 6.5 liter V-8 diesel motor, and an aftermarket Banks turbocharger installed. He did some more checking and automobile costs were substantially more in Alaska than in the lower 48. One of the turbodiesels was located in Seattle. He sent the owner an E-mail, and he said the vehicle had just been put up for sale, he was moving overseas, and couldn't keep it. He had to fly out in a week, so if they could pay him \$15 thousand cash, it was theirs. Ralph asked him if he could give them a ride from SeaTac, they were flying to SeaTac on Delta flight # 83, and would be in SeaTac at 3:00 pm local 2 days from today. If they decided to buy the vehicle, he could accompany them to the bank and he could cash a check since they banked at BofA. He told Ralph he could do that, and his name was Jack, and he'd have a sign right outside baggage claim with their names on it. Ralph said he would see them then. He called the airport, and asked them what would happen if they didn't use the Alaska Airlines portion of their ticket. She was really nice, and said they could apply for a refund if they called the airline at least 15 minutes before take-off and told them they wouldn't need the seats. Ralph got her name and the local number for Alaska Airlines at SeaTac.

He told Sam of his plans. Since they had an overnight layover, it was a good idea. He got back on line, and got the names of several diesel mechanics in Seattle, and sent them an e-mail asking how much they would charge for a pre-purchase vehicle inspection of a 1998 Chevy Suburban 2500 with a 6.5 liter turbodiesel V-8. Half an hour later, Ralph got a reply that they did it all the time, and would charge \$100 for a thorough inspection including compression test, transmission, belts hoses, electrical and transfer case. Ralph replied and said they were on a short time-frame, and would be in Seattle 2 days from today at 3:00pm local. He replied that the inspection only took an hour, and they would make sure they got right on it. Ralph got their information, including address and phone number, and wrote it all down. Ralph e-mailed the seller that they were expecting him to be there, and not to sell the vehicle out from under them. He assured Ralph that he'd be there, since he didn't want to wind up doing KP in Reykjavik Iceland. Ralph thought about that, and realized the seller believed in Karma, and Ralph thought he didn't care, as long as the guy didn't stiff them. They finished packing, and when the moving van showed up, they loaded their boxes, but made sure they had 2 weeks worth of clothes packed since the moving company said it would take 2 weeks to ship their boxes via common carrier, which was the cheapest way to do it since they didn't have any furniture or big items. They turned in their keys and spent the night in a hotel close to the airport. They were glad they were getting out of Atlanta, and hoped Doc was doing OK.

Between Ron, Nelson and Doc, they had Doc's books, gun collection, clothes, and a box of photo albums and stuff packed in a couple of days. He contacted a realtor, who called him back the next day with a cash non-contingent offer from a developer for \$35 Million. After the realtor's commission, he'd net out just under \$34 Million. Ron almost fainted when he heard that figure. Doc would make him and BA combined look like paupers! Ron didn't know the land had been in Bert's family for generations, and Bert was an only child from old Southern money, and Doc had met and married her while they both attended Chapel Hill North Carolina. She was a nursing major, and Doc, who went by Eugene at the time, was studying to become a

surgeon. Her dad made the house and property a wedding present to the newlyweds. It was owned by Bert's family for generations, so the only expenses Doc had to pay was the property tax and upkeep of the mansion, which was considerable since the old stately mansion was several hundred years old, and falling apart.

Nelson and Ron loaded the Ryder Rental truck with all the boxes, and drove it to the Common Carrier's shipping dock. Nelson wrote a check for Doc for the shipping charges, which seemed to be a lot of money to Nelson, but was a drop in the bucket to Doc. When they got back to the mansion, Doc was ready to go. He'd spent the last hour looking at their Wedding photo album, and saying goodbye to Bert and the house, which contained so many memories, but some heartache. Doc prayed that Bert was happy now in heaven, since she was rarely truly happy, but content to live with Doc. They loaded the limousine up one last time for the trip to the airport, where they were met by the sales manager of a limousine service, who gave them \$20 thousand cash for the limousine. Doc told Nelson to keep the money, and consider it a tax-free bonus for taking such good care of the limousine. They boarded a flight to Seattle an hour later, then flew to Anchorage, where Ron retrieved the SuperGoose and flew them to Allakaket. Ron had made a call while he was cleaning out Doc's house, and BA had an unused rental cleaned out and prepped for Doc and Nelson.

Doc flew up front with Ron, and Nelson found himself in the unusual position of riding in the back. Ron told Doc he was going to give him a Cessna 185 that he learned to fly on, and had been mothballed in the hangar. Doc was glad he had kept his Private Pilot's license current, and thanked Ron for the gift. 2 hours later, they landed in Allakaket, and Ron showed Doc the plane, and handed him the keys. He told Doc that the plane had an in-vehicle cross-band repeater, and had a GPS unit just like his DeHaviland had. Nelson loaded their bags into Ron's pickup, and Ron drove Doc to his new home. Ron explained that they could live there rent-free as long as they liked, or they could build a larger house in town. Looking around, Doc said that this would be fine. It was a small 2bd/2bth house with a large living room, and a small study that was lined with bookshelves. Doc thought that Ron had called ahead, and thanked him for his hospitality. Nelson moved his stuff into the smaller room, and moved Doc's stuff into the master bedroom, then started cleaning the place up, even though it was already clean. Ron shook Doc's hand, and drove home. Doc practically had to physically restrain Nelson to get him to stop cleaning. Finally he realized that Nelson was a Butler, and nothing he could do would change that. He talked to Nelson, and said if he felt like cooking and cleaning, he could, but would he please call him Doc. Nelson smiled and almost said "as you wish sir" then caught himself.

Ron came home, and Nancy practically hugged the stuffing out of him, then he got attacked by 4 kids and 2 dogs that seemed to be much larger than the last time he saw them.

Ralph and Sam remembered Ron's trick at the Security gate, and had their CCW's out and showed the TSA Goon, who waved them through. Ralph shook his head in wonder, and kept going. When they got to the Delta Gate, Ralph was confused to find that their tickets had been

upgraded for free to First Class. Finally Ralph remembered that Ron had their previous tickets upgraded, and someone must have left the VIP codes in the computer. Ralph smiled and remembered to thank Ron later, and boarded the aircraft. When they landed in Seattle, they went to Baggage claim, got their checked luggage, and standing right outside the gate was a middle-aged guy in an Air Force uniform with a sign that said Ralph and Sam. They introduced themselves, and they walked out to his vehicle. It was in immaculate shape, and looked like it had just been washed and detailed. It was dark green metallic, and Jack said it had the LT package which included a killer sound system, leather seating, and the towing and suspension upgrade package. Ralph noticed the vehicle wasn't at the stock ride height, and Jack said he had a custom Rancho suspension and 31x12.5x16 BF Goodrich TA All-terrain tires installed on 12-inch aluminum rims. Ralph looked carefully, and sure enough, it had the Rancho dual shock setup on all 4 corners, and skid plates under the transmission, oil pan, and transfer case. Jack said the only off-road preps that he didn't have done was a snorkel kit since he wasn't going to ford any rivers, and he wanted to leave it as stock-looking as possible. The rear differential had been replaced by a Torsen unit, and the front by a ARB air locker, which also included an under-the hood air compressor and air tank to air up the tires. He opened the back, and showed Ralph that he had installed the same under-carpet kit to store all his emergency gear that Ralph had, but it was empty now, except for the jack and a few other pieces of equipment that came with the vehicle. Ralph was impressed, whoever set up this Suburban knew what they were doing. It even had a 12K Warn winch up front with an aftermarket fairlead pipe bumper with some pretty spendy fog and driving lights. Jack opened the hood, and showed him the dual-battery setup, and the oversize alternator. Ralph noticed the logo on the turbocharger said Banks, and asked Jeff what the deal was. He said that very few Suburbans came from the factory with a turbocharged diesel, and Banks Engineering saw an opportunity to change a gutless diesel-powered tank into a not-so gutless diesel powered tank, and designed the turbocharger setup he saw in front of him. It included a chip swap to take advantage of the turbocharger, and it had an option for propane injection that Jeff decided he didn't need since he didn't do any heavy-duty towing with it.

Ralph asked Jack if he could drive them over to Sam's Auto Shop. Jeff smiled, and said that was where he took the Suburban all the time 15 minutes later, Ralph met Sam, who said they didn't need to pay him, because Jeff brought the vehicle over less than a month ago for periodic maintenance, and everything was cherry. Sam took Ralph aside and said the vehicle was in excellent shape, and 100K miles on a diesel was nothing. He personally knew the guy who installed all the off-road equipment. Jeff was an off-road nut, but wound up getting divorced and transferred before he got a chance to use it off-road. His ex-wife was after him for half of the vehicle, and Jeff only needed \$7 thousand to pay off his credit cards, and he was damned if he were going to pay the two-timing bitch a penny more than he had to. Sam said the vehicle as it sat was easily worth \$20K, but that just meant that Jeff would have to give her \$3,000 more. Ralph walked up to Jeff and asked him point-blank why he was selling the vehicle so cheap, it was worth over \$20K. "Ralph, if I sell it for anything more, my ex gets half, and I'd rather not give that little 2-timing witch 1 penny more than I had to, and I owe the credit card companies 7 grand, so 15 would cover my debts. I'm going overseas, and I can't keep the vehicle."

Ralph asked to see the title and registration to the vehicle. Jeff said the registration was in the glove box, and he had the title in his briefcase. Jeff took out the title, and Ralph saw that only Jeff's name appeared on the title and the registration. He looked at his watch, and asked Jeff where the nearest Bank of America was. Jeff told him there was 1 less than 5 miles away that was open for another hour. Ralph asked if Jeff had a Bill of Sale Form. Sam spoke up and said he had a few, and went into his shop to grab 1. He explained that sometimes customers couldn't pay for their repairs, so instead of getting sued, they sold the vehicle to Jeff, and he needed Bill of Sale forms just in case. Ralph watched while Jeff filled out the Bill of Sale, including Ralph and Sam's names as the buyers, and himself as the seller. He listed the sale price as \$15,000.00 but didn't sign it. Jeff said he'd sign it when he had cash in hand, so they drove to the bank, and withdrew \$15 thousand from their savings account. Jeff signed the Bill of Sale right there in the lobby, and Ralph handed him the cash. Ralph asked Jeff if he wanted a ride home, and Jeff said thanks. Ralph dropped Jeff off at his apartment, and they drove to the DMV and got the paperwork started. Since they were going to register it in Alaska in the next 30 days, they got a temporary registration that allowed them to travel for 30 days, and got the title paperwork transferred to their names.

Ralph asked the DMV clerk where a good motel or hotel was, and she gave them directions to a nearby Sheraton with a secure parking lot. They checked in, paid for the room, and then Ralph asked the clerk if they had a computer with the Internet he could borrow, they needed to plan a route to drive their vehicle to Alaska. The clerk said she could do 1 better, and handed them a AAA map that had the route marked out, and recommended hotels and diesel gas stops marked out. Ralph got a look at the distance, and realized that it would take the bulk of the time they had left just to get to Anchorage, then he asked the Clerk if there were a quicker way to get their SUV to Alaska. She said they had several long-distance car ferries that went through the Inland Passage, and stopped in Juneau that would cut their driving in half or better, but it would still take 3-6 days depending on schedules. Ralph asked how much it would cost, and she punched some buttons, and said for the 2 of them and a vehicle, right around \$1500. Ralph talked to Sam, and she said that he could either spend 4 days on a boat, and drive a short distance, or spend 4-5 days driving through Canada and Alaska. He asked the Clerk how tough it was to get diesel in Canada and Alaska. She admitted that it was probably easier than in the lower 48, since almost everyone drove diesels that far north, and had engine and tank heaters to keep their fuel and oil from gelling. She showed him on the map where all the truck stops were, and they definitely had diesel. Ralph noticed the motels were about 500 miles apart too, and asked if that was a coincidence. She told him that 500 miles was about the max you could make in 1 day because of the slower speed limits in sections of Canada. Once Ralph looked at the maps, and realized it took 2 ferries to get from Washington to Seward, which was the closest port of call to Anchorage, it was more like a week on the ferry, plus port of call stops, so he decided they were driving. He asked the Clerk where the REI store was in Seattle, and she gave him directions to the front door. He asked her about parking, and she said they had a huge lot out back. Ralph knew if they drove, he'd have to buy some sleeping bags and emergency stuff in case they got stranded.

They drove to REI the next day, and bought a small backpacking stove, fuel, emergency food (chocolate bars), 3 5-gallon water jugs, and a small tent. Samantha still had her fanny pack with her, and made one for Ralph a couple of years ago, so they were set for stuff like that. Ralph bought a compass and map, then spotted a GPS unit with mapping software already loaded. He checked, and it had the streets and roads between Seattle and Anchorage already programmed into it. The clerk said it would give them turn by turn directions, distance to the next waypoint and speed, both current and average, plus the usual GPS functions. It was a couple of hundred bucks, but Ralph didn't want to get lost or stranded. He told the clerk they were driving between Seattle and Anchorage, and he helped Ralph program all the fuel stops as waypoints, then he showed Ralph how to use it. He said that when they got ready to leave from the hotel tomorrow, to enter that as a starting point. Ralph handed the clerk his credit card, and the clerk helped him load the Suburban. He said "Nice truck - you'll definitely need it where you're going! I lived in Anchorage for a couple of years, and you talk about COLD! Alaska wrote the book! One of your first purchases should be a set of Alaskan Pac boots, a set of insulated bib overall style snowmobile pants, and a really warm parka, then get 3 sets of gloves, a polypro liner, a middle glove, and an outer mitten or you'll freeze your fingers off."

Ralph knew they were committed, but wasn't so sure about this Cold thing - to him cold was anything below 60 degrees! He made the mistake of asking Sam about it. "Oh yeah, where we lived, daytime temperatures could drop to 40 or 60 below with a wind chill of 100 degrees below zero. Why you ask?"

"It's nothing, I just think anything below 60 is cold!"

"You spend a few winters in Alaska, and you'll know what Cold is!" Samantha started laughing, since her poor husband hadn't been any further north than North Carolina in the winter. He'd freak out when he saw all that white stuff! While she thought about that, she highly suggested Ralph get some snow chains and a towing strap before they left. That got Ralph thinking, and he made a stop at an auto parts store, bought a box of flares, a gallon of Arctic Grade anti-freeze, 4 quarts of the right kind of oil for their diesel, a gallon of arctic grade windshield washer fluid, new wiper blades, a snow brush, snow shovel, 2 sets of chains that would fit their 31x 12 tires, a roll of duct tape, a roll of electrical wire, a set of the right kind of fuses, a roll of bailing wire, and a small tool kit to supplement their Gerber Multipliers. The clerk suggested a 5-pound bag of kitty litter as a traction aid, and a couple of mag light flashlights. Ralph didn't want to look at the total, but paid it anyway. Sam wondered why Ralph was going overboard -they were driving up during summer, the only snow they'd see would be on Denali and a couple of lower mountains along the way. They packed the Suburban, ate dinner, and went to bed.

They checked out the next morning, and Ralph made sure he programmed the hotel as their starting point, and plugged in the Cigarette Lighter adapter for the GPS, and attached the mounting bracket to the windshield where he could read it easily, but didn't block his view.

They both went to the bathroom, and Ralph did his best John Wayne impression “Let’s Move em Out!” and Sam laughed. They drove north on I-5 to 542, then turned onto WA-9 West until they hit the Canadian Border. They stopped them for a minute, and when Ralph explained they just bought the Suburban, and were moving to Anchorage, the border guard waved them through, and told them to have a nice trip. They took Highway 11 North to the Trans-Canada Highway headed North, then turned onto Provincial Highway 97. They drove north until the GPS beeped, and Ralph saw they were approaching Williams Lake. They drove into the truck stop, filled up, stretched and used the bathroom. Ralph came out and Sam handed him some coffee, and a muffin. “where’d you get those?”

“They’ve got a general store, and I remembered Mr. Einstein forgot to buy some food, so I stocked up, there’s a box of food big enough to last us a week, and it doesn’t need refrigeration.”

“Ok, how’d you get the coffee hot?”

“They had an immersion heater for \$10.00, so I bought it, along with a pack of 50 instant coffee packets with cream and sugar already added, and a box of 50 instant hot chocolate and 2 large travel mugs that just fit perfectly in the cup holders. The guy was nice enough to give me a couple of spoons, forks and knives, and I bought a pack of napkins, and a large 8-roll pack of TP, and a large pump dispenser of Purell just in case.”

“I guess I’d probably starve without you?”

“Yup, probably - well Albert, let’s hit the road!”

“Why, what did it do to us?”

They got back on 97 north before Ralph made any more bad jokes. At Prince George, they turned West to get onto 16. They spent the night in this small quaint motel just outside of Stewart, took advantage of their free breakfast, used the bathroom, and were on the road by 0800. They had a very long drive ahead of them. They had to go way north on 37 almost 400 miles, and there weren’t many stops in between. When they found a fuel station in Stewart, the owner highly recommended they buy 2 5-gallon cans full of diesel, just in case, because some of the stations ran out during the summer. Ralph was glad the old geezer was nice enough to warn them, and he only charged them \$10.00 each for the 2 DOT 5-gallon cans, plus the diesel. Ralph told the old Geezer “Merci monsieur!” Ralph was amazed when he started talking to him in French. He didn’t realize there was that many French Canadians this far west. They carried on in French for 5 minutes, then the old geezer refunded half the cost of the cans, Ralph guessed that they only gouged the tourists, or maybe the fact that they were doctors moving to Anchorage. He recommended emptying the cans as soon as they were down 10 gallons, and refilling them every time they filled up, gas stations that had fuel were far and between, especially between here and Whitehorse. He didn’t know how things were in Alaska, but they

were probably similar. Ralph said “Au revoir” and got back in the Suburban.

They put the 5-gallon cans in the back of the vehicle, and hit the road, they had a long drive ahead. Ralph was glad that the old guy had sold them the extra diesel, since several smaller stations had “NO FUEL” signs in their windows. When they had gone about 250 miles, Ralph carefully poured the 2 5-gallon cans of diesel into the tank, almost filling it again. Ralph guessed that if he stayed out of boost, the Suburban got almost 20 mpg. Finally they found another small gas station that had diesel, and filled up the tank and both cans. They made it to Whitehorse without any further incidents, filled up, got a room, ate dinner at a small café, and ate breakfast at the breakfast bar the next morning. They were on the road again by 0800, today would be even longer than yesterday. They drove northwest until they reached Beaver Creek, which was just this side of the Canadian border, and filled up, used the restroom, and got out to stretch. They were going to stay overnight in Tok Alaska, which was just over 400 miles from Whitehorse. From Tok, it was only about 300 miles to Anchorage. So far they had seen a lot of scenery, and their trip was significantly cheaper and faster than taking the ferry. It should only take them 4-5 days to drive, versus at least 4 days via ferry, plus driving up from Seward, not to mention almost \$1500 for the ferry.

They reached Tok a couple of hours later, and they were too tired to drive into Anchorage, so they got a motel room, and stayed the night. The next morning they filled up the tank and both cans, and ate a quick breakfast, then hit the road. They were in Anchorage 6 hours later, and parked in the Hospital parking lot, and let Steve know they were in town. Steve said he had already arranged a nice apartment for them, and all they had to do was sign the lease and move in. Ralph said they had no furniture, and Steve said he could fix that, and handed them a check for \$10,000.00. They deposited it at the nearest B of A and transferred their account to that branch. Ralph said they would get them an address for the account. The teller was really nice, and suggested a branch of the post office right near their apartment to rent a PO Box from. They drove to the apartment, signed a 6-month lease, paid the first month (the landlord took an out-of-state check since it was drawn against B of A and Steve vouched for them so he waived the deposits), and handed them 2 keys. It was a downstairs apartment, and Ralph liked Steve’s taste, the apartment was big, airy and clean, with new carpets and paint.

They unloaded the Suburban, and checked the phone book for a furniture store. There was one nearby, so they went there and bought enough furniture to get by for now. The store owner made them a killer deal on a 27” HDTV and a small stereo system with a CD/DVD player, VCR, and an AM/FM receiver. Ralph gave him the apartment number, and asked that it be delivered that afternoon, since they had no furniture. He asked the manager where you went to get your phone and electric turned on, and the Manager called a friend of his at the phone company, explained they were doctors, and needed the phone service in case of emergency, and he told Ralph the service would be connected within the hour. He gave him the phone number for the electric company, and they told him the power was already on, and all they had to do was switch it into their name. Ralph said he didn’t have a billing address yet, she said that he had to call back within 48 hours or they would disconnect and it would take a week to get it

turned back on. Ralph wrote the number down, drove to the Post office, got a PO Box, and called the lady at the power company back. She updated their records, and thanked Ralph. Ralph called back the phone company to change the billing address, and they did it over the phone. Finally he called the Cable Company, signed up for basic cable and cable modem service. He asked the operator if he could use his existing cable modem. She said probably not, and they'd send a repairman to their apartment today to install the cable and the cable modem. Ralph thanked her and drove home right before the furniture company truck arrived. Ralph stayed out of the way, while Sam told them which room the furniture went in, and where she wanted it. Just when they left, the Cable guy showed up, hooked up their brand-new TV and stereo (they had FM stereo over their coax system as well) and connected their cable modem. He said that Ralph's unit was close, but the wrong configuration. He admitted that they all bought their cable modems from the same company, and installed a proprietary chip so they wouldn't work on anyone else's system to keep people from switching. When Ralph checked his AOL account, he had a ton of E-mails. He only answered the ones from Doc and George, and tossed the rest. Sam made dinner, and they went to bed early.

Chapter 48 - Setting up

Ralph and Sam made a list of stuff they had to do on their last day off before they started work at Anchorage Regional Hospital. They had power, cable, and phone. The water and heat were paid for by the landlord since he used the same boiler to make steam for the radiant heat system, and hot water for the showers. He used a blend valve to reduce the temperature of the hot water below 120 degrees, and had the hot water on a recirculating pump. Since the boiler had plenty of hot water on demand, he saved the cost of a hot water tank by tapping off his boiler that was running pretty much year round anyway. Anchorage was all on Natural Gas and they had a huge supply of it, so there were no worries of running out, so the stove and dryer were both gas. Sam realized they had washer/dryer hookups on an alcove off the kitchen, so she added that to their list, especially since she was due in 6 months. Ralph wanted a new computer desk, and she suggested getting a folding table for now, since the 2nd bedroom would have to be rearranged in 6 months anyway. Ralph was glad, because right now his monitor was sitting on a milk crate, and he was sitting on the floor Indian style, and it was beaucoup awkward! Ralph got out the phone book, and checked the Yellow Pages for stores to get stuff. Sam said they needed food, and she checked the refrigerator, turned it on so it would be cold by the time they got back. She started making a grocery list, and wondered if there was a Warehouse Store nearby like Costco or Sam's. Looking through the Yellow Pages, Ralph couldn't find a listing for Costco or Sam's Club, but spotted a listing for Cellular phone companies, so Ralph added Cellular Phone service to the list. There was a bunch of them, so he decided to call Steve at the Hospital for advice.

“Alaska Regional Hospital, this is Steve.”

“Steve, Dr. Raphael Lacombe, what Cellular service does the hospital use - we were thinking of getting personal cellular service for Samantha and me.”

“Ralph, the hospital provides Cellular phones with unlimited local minutes and paging service to all doctors on Staff, that includes you and Sam.”

“Great, how about personal use?”

“The hospital wants you to have that phone on your person 24/7, so they don’t care how much you personally use that phone, but you do pay for your own long-distance calls. The hospital will send you a statement each month with any long distance calls they can’t identify. If any of them are business calls, like to doctors, patients, pharmacies, etc, just highlight them and deduct them from the bill when you pay the hospital, otherwise the service is free. They issue a digital PCS phone with a speed charger, case, and cigarette lighter adapter to you when you start. Personnel will take care of all that tomorrow.”

“Thanks Steve, by the way, here’s our personal home phone number (xxx) xxx-xxxx.”

"Ok, thanks Ralph, just make sure Personnel has that number as well, and make sure you give them the PO Box or your account number for direct deposit."

"Thanks Steve, you saved us a couple of stops. If you wanted to buy food in large quantities, like by the case, where do you go in Anchorage?"

"Wilson Brothers on Rosewood is about it, we don't have a Costco or Sam's yet."

"Thanks Steve, see ya tomorrow!"

Ralph scratched a couple of stops off his list, and told Sam they could buy most of the foodstuff at Wilson Brothers. He said that they could find everything else at Wal-mart or Northway Mall. He walked outside, and set all the seats flush with the floor except the front 2 to maximize storage, they were going to need it! Ralph remembered Jack said the vehicle had an alarm on it, so once they started putting stuff in it, he'd activate the alarm. Sam was ready to go, so they got in and started the Suburban. Ralph filled it up yesterday, so they were good to go, and they went. Sam piled a flat-bed cart full of canned goods and frozen food. They didn't have a big freezer, so she didn't buy too much frozen stuff, just enough for several quick meals, since their schedules could get hectic. By the time they got out of Wal-Mart, Ralph was just about shopped-out. They took everything home, and Ralph assembled the heavy-duty metal shelving they bought at Wal-mart, then they loaded it full of canned goods and supplies that went into the second bedroom. Ralph hoped they bought a house before they had kids #2-4, or they would be really crowded.

Ralph put up the 4-foot long folding table, put his monitor on it, and slid the CPU underneath, and plugged everything into a small UPS he bought, then he set the printer up, connected it to the computer, and plugged it into the surge suppression side of the UPS. Ralph connected the Coax cable to the cable modem, and the modem to the computer using the supplied Ethernet cable. Since the Cable guy had already installed everything the other day, as soon as it was plugged in, and everything powered up, he was able to log onto the internet. Once he was satisfied everything was working, he shut it back down to await the delivery of their washer and dryer. They picked up a ding and scratch discounted washer/dryer pair for 50% off, and later that afternoon, the 2 guys delivering it put a few more scratches in it, so Ralph was glad they didn't buy the pretty model, because he would have been mad!

Ralph called the B of A branch, and verified they had his PO Box as his mailing address, and his account number was still the same. She asked if they should put his Driver's License number on their new checks, and Ralph felt like smacking himself - they had to get to the DMV ASAP! He asked the teller where the nearest DMV office was, and she gave him directions from their apartment, since she still had their apartment number in the computer. He thanked her and hung up, and said "Sam, we've got to get to the DMV right now!" They jumped into the Suburban, and arrived 15 minutes before they closed. Luckily there was no waiting line, so he took all the paperwork up to the next open window, got the Suburban registered in Alaska,

got the new plates, and traded their Georgia Driver's Licenses for Alaskan Driver's licenses. Ralph was amazed that they didn't have to pass a test. The clerk did say they needed to get proof of insurance within 30 days, so Ralph added that to his Do List. His old insurance company was paid up through next month, and he already notified them of the sale of the old Suburban, and the purchase of the new one. When he got home, he called the insurance company's 800 Customer Service line, and the lady that answered the phone said they did business in Alaska, and they could file the proof of insurance with the Alaskan Department of Transportation. Ralph wrote her name down and thanked her.

Ralph thought "Food... Check, Utilities... Check, Bank... Check, Apartment... Duh (check), Vehicle... Check, So what am I forgetting?"

Ralph decided to ask Sam. "Did you e-mail Doc and Ron, and let them know we arrived safely, and are going to work tomorrow?"

"Nope, I just responded to their e-mails, so they know we're here. Uh, Sam... Did you forget something?"

"What?"

"Aren't you supposed to put in for a leave of absence when you are pregnant?"

"I talked to my OBGYN, and they used to insist, but now the only reason to stop surgery is when my belly gets too big for me to operate, usually during the 3rd trimester. Since I'm not in the room when they're administering the large initial dose of gas, I'm fine."

"OK Sam, whatever you say!"

Sam thought that sounded suspiciously like a "Yes Dear" but decided to let it slide.

The next day they faced the gauntlet of Personnel. The good news was they issued them a 2-week supply of green scrubs and 4 white coats, a brand new stethoscope, their nameplates and ID tags with a magnetic strip to punch in and out, a cell phone with all the bells and whistles including call waiting, a brand new PDA with the PDR and some other stuff pre-loaded, and enough manuals to make a nice bonfire. They got paid their salary every 2 weeks via direct deposit, and they'd get a monthly statement showing accrued vacation and sick leave as well as a monthly statement for their cellular phones. They explained the hospital's long distance policy, that if it wasn't demonstrably business related, the doctor was responsible for paying for their own long distance cellular calls. They had a free roaming feature, but the cellular system didn't work too far outside of Anchorage, so roaming was pretty moot until they got to another area with cellular coverage, like Whitehorse or Tok. Ralph asked if their system worked in Allakaket. The Personnel Director thought it was a strange request, but looked it up, and was amazed that Allakaket had a bigger Cellular system than Anchorage. She asked why they were

interested, and Sam explained they were good friends of Ron Williams. The Director immediately recognized Ron's name, and knew he was the President and Owner of Allakaket Airlines. These two had some high-powered friends, so she typed a notation into their files while she talked that said they were to get the VIP treatment. Once she was finished, she said they'd have to go to Steve's office to discuss their schedules.

They stood, and she shook their hands, then they went to see Steve. Steve stood to greet them, and handed them some more forms to sign. One brought Ralph to a full stop, and asked Steve what the heck it meant. Steve said the "no weapons" policy didn't apply to CCW holders, it was just there to discourage non-CCW holders from carrying openly. He said that as long as their weapons were concealed and they had a CCW, they didn't care. Ralph felt better. Steve asked them about their scheduling requests. Ralph said they basically had to work the same shift, since they only had 1 vehicle, and getting to the hospital without a 4wd during the winter could be a bitch! Steve laughed and said he was right, that even with the city plowing like crazy, sometimes the city just shut down during snow emergencies, which happened once or twice a year, but their Suburban could handle it as long as they had their chains on and they took it easy. He typed into his computer, and told them they were both working days, Monday through Friday, they let the Junior Residents handle the evening and weekend traffic. Since there wasn't a lot of Major Trauma from gunfights and stabbings, the night and weekends could be slow. The only time the ER got busy was during Hunting Season, when all the hunters from the Lower 48 came to Alaska to try and bag a Caribou or Grizzly, and ran into trouble. Steve said they were free to go home, their first scheduled shift wasn't until tomorrow. Ralph asked if they could meet the staff first. Steve thought that was a good idea, it was slow today, and he had no idea what it would be like tomorrow. He stood up and said "This way please" and led them to the Staff Lounge. He pushed the intercom button and said "5-minute Staff meeting in the Doctor's lounge. Any available staff please attend."

10 minutes later, the lounge filled up, and Steve stood up in front. "Ladies and Gentlemen, I'd like to introduce our new ER Chief Resident, Dr. Raphael Lacombe, and his wife Dr. Samantha Lacombe, who joins our Staff as a Board Certified Emergency Surgeon. Raphael goes by Ralph, and Samantha goes by Sam. Please use their first initials and last name on any orders or documents to avoid confusion. Thank you, and that is all." Steve walked back to his office, leaving Sam and Ralph to get acquainted with the rest of the staff. Most of them had to get back to work, so they said hi, and shook hands, then left. The head nurse stayed around for a few minutes, and asked if they had any questions. "Thanks, but not today."

"Ok, if you need anything, my name's Nurse Ratchet, and if I hear any cracks about "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest" you might get stuck washing bedpans." Ralph and Sam both assured her that they wouldn't be so rude, then she said she had to get back to work, and it was nice meeting them. On their way out, Ralph asked Steve if he needed anything else. He said that Personnel needed a copy of their CCW's for the records. Ralph and Sam both produced their Federal CCW's, and Steve thought that it must be nice to have low friends in high places, and made a copy of each, and handed them back their CCW's. He said he'd hand carry them up to

Personnel in a minute. Other than that, they were free to go. Ralph and Sam walked back out to their Suburban, and drove home to organize everything.

Back in Allakaket, Ron was thinking, but not getting anywhere. Suddenly, he remembered Ralph and Sam had moved to Anchorage, which triggered other thoughts. He got on the Internet, then called Bill and BA, and made a suggestion. BA said that Ron should ask Doc first, so he called Doc.

“Doc, its Ron. Now that Sam and Ralph are living in Alaska, I had an idea that you might be interested in. They have to live in Anchorage to work, but where would they go if a disaster struck?”

“I never thought of that, obviously you have an idea, so let’s hear it.”

“I’ve got over 1,000 acres around my lodge at HelpmeJack Lake, and the clearing behind the lodge is now fairly big due to logging over the years for firewood. I was wondering if you wanted to become a partner in a Hunting/Fishing lodge behind our summer lodge. That way the building and supplies would be available to Sam’s family in an emergency in case Anchorage became too dangerous.”

“Interesting idea Ron, now that I’m rolling in money, I don’t see why not, it would also give Nelson and I a place to stay if we wanted to go fishing or hunting.”

“Ok, if you’re interested, I suggest we form a Limited Partnership, as a subsidiary of Allakaket Airlines, and call it Doc’s Lodge, Inc. We’d need to hire people including an Alaskan Registered Guide if non-residents wish to hunt big game, and enough people to run the lodge during hunting and fishing season, plus a couple of boats to fish other spots on HelpmeJack lake. Allakaket Airlines would provide Air transport, and I could split the costs of opening the business and building the lodge, less the value of the land. All we’d need is a Business License and incorporation documents, and some paperwork from Fish and Game.”

“How much is all this going to cost?”

“They built our lodge for less than \$150 thousand, so I’m guessing right around \$200 thousand for the building, and the supplies incidental to the lodge. The boats and stuff might run another \$100 grand, so you’re looking at between \$300 and \$400 thousand.”

“Ok, so my share of the start-up costs would be around \$200 Thousand.”

“Plus food and other start-up costs, then we’d have recurring costs of food, supplies, maintenance and repairs, and wages. That would be offset by income provided by hunters and fishermen.”

“Sounds like a plan, why don’t you have BA crunch the numbers and let me know. By the Way, Thanks Ron.”

“What for - I haven’t done anything yet?”

“For thinking about the safety and security of Sam, Ralph, and their kids.”

“Doc, Sam and I will always be close. Anything I can do to help her, Ralph and their kids without jeopardizing Nancy and the Kids, I’ll do in a heartbeat.”

“I know Ron, you still love her.”

“In a way, I’ll always have a special place in my heart for Sam. I just want her to be happy, and anything I can do to help that, or their survival would make me happy!”

“Thanks Ron, take care and God Bless!”

“You too Doc.”

Ron called BA, and told him he had a tentative Go, but not to spend a lot of money until Doc got on board. BA said that filing the incorporation and business licenses would be small change, and if it fell through, they could write off the expenses. Ron said the Corporation would be a limited partnership, and a subsidiary of Allakaket Airlines, so he could spend AA money on the project, without having to dip into his personal savings. BA thought Ron was starting to get the hang of this Big Business stuff.

Chapter 49 - The Lodge

BA had a brainstorm, and called the manager of the biggest lodge in the area, and asked for his help. When BA told him they were setting up a lodge at the HelpmeJack Lake, he got more helpful, since they wouldn't be in direct competition, the only species they really had there were moose and caribou, and the big record-breaking bulls were way east of them and closer to Denali. He gave BA the skinny about what they would need to get started, what paperwork they would need, and he even recommended a Registered Guide that was looking for a lodge to work with, he was tired of living in the field 6 months out of the year, so the manager knew he'd love their set-up with a resident herd of Caribou and moose. BA thanked him for his help, and started making phone calls and crunching numbers. 2 days later he called Ron.

"Your preliminary estimate was pretty close, I talked to the manager of a big lodge south of Allakaket, who was more than willing to help, and he even recommended a Registered Guide we could hire on a seasonal basis. I'm e-mailing you the spreadsheet I've done."

"BA, could you e-mail a copy to Doc, so he'll have a copy when I call him. Thanks, talk to you later."

An hour later Doc called Ron.

"I got the spreadsheet BA worked up. I'll authorize up to \$500,000 to start up the lodge, that's my share of the \$1 Million that this project better not exceed."

"BA's estimates only show an initial outlay of \$500 thousand, so why did you authorize up to \$500 thousand each?"

"Because stuff happens, and I don't want this project to come to a standstill while you get my approval for every cost overrun. Just go ahead and do it right the first time. What were you planning for power?"

"The same setup as our lodge uses. A huge military diesel generator hooked to a battery bank and inverters in the basement, with 1,000 gallons of diesel. The main power source will be a PV roof, and wind turbines that will charge the batteries, and run the inverter."

"Sounds like a plan, so when do they start construction."

"BA is finishing the legal paperwork. If it's OK with you, we wanted to call the business Doc's Lodge Inc. and it would be a limited partnership between you and Allakaket Airlines, so I can use AA money for operating expenses, and write off any losses against the corporation. I wanted to do a limited partnership so neither one of us would be liable for anything more than our initial investment. We also need to get a Million-dollar General Commercial Liability

policy before we can bring in any paying customers. My work comp carrier said they'd cover any employees of Doc's Lodge, so we're set there. I'll have BA call you when we're done with the legal paperwork so we can sign the paperwork and get things started."

2 days later, BA called Doc and Ron, and they signed the paperwork, and Doc's Lodge LLC was in business. Ron hired the contractors that built his lodge, and they got right to work. Ron had the space out behind their lodge, and build a huge ranch-style structure, with the main roofline oriented east-west to take full advantage of the huge southern exposure the design would have. They flew Ron's tractor out to the site to dig the basement and the septic field, and brought in their own well drilling rig that tapped into the same aquifer that Ron's house did. They logged the trees off Ron's property like last time, but the building went up much faster, since they had all done this before when they built Ron's place. They bought the inverters and power-handling equipment from Outback Power, and installed the generator, battery bank and inverters, and the fuel tank in the basement, leaving over half the basement available for storage. Once the building was up and the contractors cleared out, Ron called Bear, and they arranged a "storm shelter" next to the hunting lodge that was bigger than even Ron's place, and they located a steel building big enough to hold Doc's Cessna and parked it on top of the shelter to camouflage the shelter. The only hint that there was anything underneath the hangar was the trap door in the corner. Bear was still crowded in his shelter/bunker, so Ron called Ralph, and they said they'd love to store some serious hardware in their shelter, especially when Ron told them what they had access to, evidently George had really rubbed off on those two, and they thought that having a fully prepared Bug out shelter would be a prefect idea, and called up Doc and thanked him. They neglected to tell him about the hardware, because he was still having problems with them being armed in a hospital.

Once everything was good to go, Ron got some help in the form of several Baggage Handlers, and transferred furniture, supplies and everything needed for a hunting lodge to the new lodge. It would be ready to open at the start of next year's hunting season. Ron flew Doc out to see his new hunting lodge. To say he was impressed was an understatement. He asked Ron about the hangar, and Ron said that Doc needed someplace to store his Cessna when he visited the lodge. Doc gave Ron a big hug, and said "Thanks, I'd forgotten about the Cessna. It's too late to go hunting or fishing this season, but I'll make sure I use it next year." Doc had been busy this year, because when the Hospital Administrator found out they had a retired professor of neurosurgery living in Allakaket, he called him a couple of times a year to consult on several surgeries. Doc thought he was volunteering his time until the hospital paid him a \$50,000.00 consulting fee. He put all his fees into a trust fund for Ralph and Sam, to be transferred upon his signature releasing the account, or upon his death. They even gave him a title "Professor Emeritus of Neurosurgery" and put him on staff. Doc thought it was funny, but didn't turn down the money, or the occasional consult. Besides, he enjoyed flying right seat with Ron when they flew to Anchorage for the consultations. He didn't do the surgery any more; he consulted with their surgeons who were going to perform the delicate surgery.

Bert was born right on time, and Sam wound up taking 6 months off from the hospital, 3 before

and 3 after delivery. The hospital had an excellent day care system that allowed nursing mothers to nurse their babies, and to spend their break time with their kids, so Sam returned to work. Just like his Mom, Bert was a blond cherub as an infant. 6 months later, Sam was pregnant again, and they were well on their way to the 4 kids they wanted. Ralph knew that they would soon need a house, and called BA and asked for suggestions. He knew of a lot on the southwest corner of Anchorage that had been for sale for decades, with an OK view, but a lot of timber and privacy.

They drove over to see the lot, and found out it wasn't in the City of Anchorage, and not connected to city services, except power and phone. That was OK with Ralph and Sam, who had different ideas about what they wanted to do with their homes than the average American. By the time they were finished, the contractor said that a nuclear bomb could hit Elmendorf and they'd be fine, but that was exactly what Ralph wanted, and they had money to burn, thanks to Doc's wedding present. Between the half-mil original deposit, plus interest, they had almost twice as much money as they needed. Their house was 3,000 square feet above ground, plus a full basement below ground that went down over 12 feet due to the deep freeze line in Anchorage. The basement and house had 6" thick reinforced concrete walls, with a stucco outer treatment to make it look like the other houses, and R-60 insulation. The roof itself was a double layer, with a conventional outer, and a concrete slab inside to seal the house completely from the outside air. They installed air handling equipment in the basement that would keep the pressure in the house slightly higher than atmospheric in the event of an emergency so any bio or chemical agents wouldn't penetrate. The floor between the house and the basement was actually as strong as some high-rise buildings, with a steel deck supporting a 6" thick reinforced concrete floor.

Part of the basement housed their Grid-intertie power system by Outback power, and a huge propane-powered generator. They dug another hole, and installed a 3,000 gallon propane tank in a concrete-reinforced CMU brick enclosure, which was blast-resistant by design. They had their own well and a 1,000 gallon cistern with booster pumps to provide pressure. The roofing surface was covered with thin-film PV panels that made an estimated 10KWH in full sun. They had a wind turbine bank consisting of 6 Air-x wind turbines connected to their battery bank rated at 120KWH. Their inverter was sized at 10KW, so they had a 12-hour backup at full power, which they never figured on using, but with the Outback system, their 10KW inverter was actually 4 2500w inverters in parallel, and their smart system only activated inverters as needed, so if they were only using 2500 watts, the other 3 inverters would disconnect, and draw zero power until the control system detected an increased load, and turned them back on. With the huge propane tank, their water heater, stove, and furnace were all gas. They even installed a small gas-burning, glass-front cast-iron stove with a sealed firebox, so there was no air exchange inside the building to eliminate the CO hazard instead of a fireplace. They didn't have enough wood on their property to warrant a wood-burning stove.

During their spare time, Ralph rented a rototiller and planted a small garden out back. They knew they had their Bug-out location at the lodge, but they wanted to make their home as

survivable as possible. All the windows were built with 3/8" armor steel shutters with a thin wood veneer, and the door would stop a .308 round at point blank range, or a 12 gauge slug. The multiple locks on the doors were extra-long throw, and set into a steel frame, that was bolted into the concrete with 6" long bolts, and wasn't coming out without high explosives. When the contractor saw the design, he said they were building a fortress, to which Ralph said "It's our money!" Their new house was finished before their second son, Larry, was born. Moving while 9 months pregnant was no fun, but they had some help. They had made friends with some committed Christians from the same church that BA used to go to, and one of them commented he wished he could own a house like theirs; it looked like it could stop a horde of MZB's. Ralph didn't say anything, but remembered the comment; they might have stumbled onto some preparedness types.

By the time Sam had Larry, she was ready to be a full-time Mommy, and they checked their finances. Since the house was paid off, and Ralph was raking in the dough, there was no real reason for Sam to work, so she talked to Steve. She could either take an extended leave of absence, or quit. If she ever wanted to return to surgery at this hospital, he'd highly suggest the extended leave of absence, which could be up to 10 years for mothers with children. Since they had #2 of 4, she'd need 3-4 years to have #3 and 4, then 5-10 years until they were in school. She agreed to the 10-year leave of absence on two conditions: 1) she could come back sooner if they decided not to have #3 or #4, and she could permanently resign at any time. Steve agreed, since the hospital was hurting for ER Surgeons, and keeping her on staff on an extended leave of absence would help them for their next review. She talked it over with Ralph, who agreed, and she signed the leave of absence form. She gave Steve back her cell phone and all her stuff. He said he'd keep her ID handy just in case, and wished them well. Sam felt funny, she'd gone from Doctor Lacombe to Mommy, and hoped she was doing the right thing.

Driving home that afternoon, Ralph spotted an older 4x4 sitting on a street corner with a For Sale sign on it. He got a better look at it, and noticed it was an International Harvester, probably either a Scout II or a Traveler by the looks of it. Sam was wondering why he made a sudden right turn, stopped and parked until he said "You're not going to believe this, but I just saw a vehicle I've always wanted, and since you're going to be a stay-at home mom, we're going to need 2 vehicles" and he got out to look at it. He released the hood clamps, and couldn't believe his eyes, it was an in-line 6-cylinder turbodiesel. Doing some more checking, he could see someone had done some serious work restoring and refurbishing the vehicle. It looked like it had an air compressor and tank just like their Suburban. He saw the phone number on the windshield, and grabbed his cell phone, and called the number. An older man answered the phone, and said yes, it was for sale; he had to have surgery, and couldn't afford the surgery and the vehicle. The longer they talked, the more Ralph was interested. The vehicle was a complete restore/rebuild, and had several aftermarket upgrades including ARB air lockers front and rear, and a custom Atlas transfer case that gave him a 2-wheel low/high, and a 4-wheel low/high range, a 10k warn winch, dual batteries, a high-output alternator, Warn locking hubs on all 4 corners, and a nice set of Hella driving and fog lights attached to the front pipe bumper with radiator guard The body was as-is, but he had done everything needed

mechanically to make it a very formidable off-road vehicle. Ralph saw the lift kit, and the BFG 33x10x15 Mud-Terrain tires, and the guy said it had a 3-inch lift kit to clear the 33's, and a custom Rancho suspension upgrade. When the guy mentioned it was a Traveler, and not a Scout II, Ralph was really interested. He asked the guy if he could come over so he could start it up, and he admitted he couldn't drive, so Ralph offered to come over and pick him up in the Suburban. They got back in the Suburban, and the guy gave him turn-by-turn directions to his house. He walked out front, and opened the back door, and climbed in.

"Ralph, my name is Jacques Turner."

« Jacques, Mon nom est Raphaël Lacombe »

« You're pas d'autour ici, n'est-ce pas ? »

« You're redressent, I'm un Cajun français de Louisiane, mon dernier nom est Lacombe. »

« You're loin de maison, ce qui vous apporte en Alaska ? »

« Mon épouse et moi sont des médecins, et travaillent à l'hôpital ici à Anchorage. »

« L'épouse de you're parle-t-elle français ? »

Sam spoke up, « Oui, je Fai's monsieur, quand nous avons été engagés, il ai dû pratiquer son Cajun ainsi il pourrait aider ses parents' en Louisiane. »

Switching back to English, Jacques said, "I hope you like my baby, she was a labor of love. The only thing I didn't do to it that I wanted to was to install a snorkel kit. I've got the receipts for all the work done and the parts if you want them."

10 minutes later, they reached the IH Traveler, and Jacques ran his hands down the side, caressing it like a little child, and speaking quietly in French. Ralph and Sam knew he was saying goodbye to his creation, so they didn't interrupt. Finally, he handed Ralph the keys, and he used the nerf bar step to climb into the cab, and turned the key in the ignition to engage the glow plugs, and after a minute, turned it to start, and it started right up. Ralph let it idle and climbed back down.

"Jacques, you did an excellent job, she purrs like a kitten, and starts right up. Is there anyone around here you trust to work on it?"

Jacques handed him the card of the mechanic that helped him rebuild it "This is the gentleman who helped me rebuild her, he knows everything about her."

Ralph asked him if he could take it for a test ride, and asked Jacques if he wanted to get in the

passenger seat. After a slight struggle, Jacques made it into the deep bucket seat on the passenger side, and clipped into the 4-point restraint system. When he saw the 4-point system and the full roll cage, he knew Jacques was serious about off-road driving. Ralph buckled his 4-point as well, and Sam waited in the Suburban where it was warm. Half an hour later, Ralph came back grinning from ear to ear. Between the Nissan 3.3 liter diesel, the turbocharger, and the 4-speed manual transmission, and the 2-speed transfer case, the Traveler was capable of great acceleration on the street, and good highway performance. Ralph asked Jacques how much he wanted for it, and he said he needed 15,000 for the surgery. Ralph offered him \$20,000.00 for it, and Jacques said "That's too much!"

"Jacques, you did a wonder rebuilding her, and I wanted to pay you more than you asked. I can afford to pay you \$20,000 easily. That way, when you recover, you can buy another International Harvester, and build another one."

"Thanks Ralph, I'd like that!"

Ralph knew that there was a B of A nearby and asked Jacques about registration, title, and bill of sale. Jacques took out a folder with everything in it, and receipts for all the parts and labor, and on top was the title, registration, and a blank bill of sale. Ralph checked the title and registration, and the names and addresses matched. He wasn't too worried that the Title was a wreck title, since most IHC trucks and vehicles are resurrected from junkyards. He asked Jacques if they could go to his bank so Ralph could pay him cash, and Jacques could fill out the Bill of Sale. Jacques said he banked at the same bank, so they could just do a bank draft to his account. Ralph asked Samantha to follow them to the bank, and then Jacques needed a lift home. Sam suggested she just drive home, since the kids were still with the babysitter, and he take care of the details. Ralph gave her a kiss, and said he'd see her at home. An hour later, Ralph pulled up in his IHC Traveler, and parked it in the garage next to Sam's Suburban. Sam had Bert and Larry fed, and was ready for a nap herself. Ralph gave her a hug and a kiss, and said he'd make dinner, and to take it easy. She laid down on the couch, and half an hour later Ralph had dinner ready. Sam was really hungry, and the gumbo he made looked delicious. They said grace, and ate quickly in case either of the boys would wake up. They went back into the living room, and watched a movie, then got the boys ready for bed, and went to bed themselves.

The next morning Ralph drove over to the DMV office and registered the vehicle in his name, and paid the licensing fees for 1 year. He called his insurance company, and added the new vehicle to their insurance. He told them to list the value of the vehicle at \$20,000.00 since it was a full restoration with receipts. The customer service clerk told him to keep track of his receipts, they'd need it for an insurance claim, since the vehicle had no blue book value. On the way home, he stopped at the bank, and took out a Safe Deposit box in both their names, with a single signature required. The teller told Ralph that Sam would have to sign the signature card before she'd have access, and Ralph thanked her for reminding him. He put the title and receipts in the box, and received 2 keys from the teller. When he got home, he told Sam he got

a safe deposit box, and she needed to stop at the bank sometime to sign the signature card so she'd have access to their safe deposit box. After playing with the boys, Ralph logged onto the internet, and located some web sites dedicated to old IHC vehicles, and copied several of their ideas, including an idea for secure storage, and a list of things to put in there. He decided to leave the top on the Traveler for security, and have someone install a security box under the rear carpet. He made a list of contents, and realized he needed 2 of them, and a security box for the Suburban as well. He'd kill 2 birds with 1 stone, and buy twice as much of everything he needed, and have a local body shop fabricate and install the security box. All he had to tell them was he was a doctor and that should satisfy their curiosity. He found a website that sold off-road equipment cheap, and bookmarked it for later. He went through the yellow pages, and located a couple of auto body shops. A couple hung up on him when he mentioned a secure storage box, and 1 showed some interest, but suggested coming in person, so he drove on over.

"I don't know what the big secret is, I'm a doctor, and need to store my medical kit, and some gear in my vehicle, and I need a secure and hidden storage to keep my vehicle from getting broken into."

The owner of the shop said he was sorry, since he never knew whom he was dealing with over the phone, and was afraid of entrapment, or getting involved in smuggling or other illegal activities.

"I can assure you there is nothing illegal involved, I just need 2 hidden secure storage boxes made and installed in my 2 vehicles. One is this Suburban, and the other is a IHC Traveler."

The shop owner pulled out a pad and paper, then a calculator, and quoted a pretty reasonable price to Ralph. He added 50 bucks each when Ralph said the cases had to be locking with pick-resistant locks, since he carried narcotics in his medical kit. The owner took some measurements of Ralph's Suburban, and told him to come back a week later to have it installed after hours. He did all this work on the side after hours so his employees wouldn't know and cause security issues. Ralph appreciated that, and said he'd be back a week later to get the box installed in the Suburban. He showed up a week later, and the box fit perfectly. The owner opened the lid, checked under the body to make sure he wasn't going to hit anything, and installed 4 heavy-duty rivets to keep the box in place, and cut them flush on the bottom, and sprayed them with a can of undercoating. He replaced the carpet with a slightly oversized piece of carpet, and finished it to look stock. He had Ralph write him a check personally, so Ralph paid him \$500 for the first box. The owner said for him to bring in the other vehicle tomorrow at this time, and he'd measure it up. A little over a week later, Ralph had secure storage boxes in both vehicles, and started ordering the gear to fill them. He was amazed at how much stuff he could get into the box, including a complete emergency kit, clothes, food, water, an advanced first aid kit, their medical bags, a spare box of .45 acp ammo and 2 spare magazines for their P-14s loaded with Flying Ashcan rounds.

Chapter 50 - The Book of Armaments

Once Ralph had anything he wanted in the case which was the full width of the back, 6 inches tall, and 4 feet deep; he still had room left over. He thought of his AR-15's but the Bushmasters were way too big to fit. He called Ron, and told him of his problem. Ron said he knew exactly what he needed, and Allakaket Airlines had a couple of spares to give them on a long-term loan. Ralph said his next day off was Saturday, and asked Ron if they'd like to come over and see their new house. Ron said he could bring the items while he was at it, and Ralph said "Yes" in a heartbeat. Ron asked Ralph if they could meet him at the Alaska Airlines VIP lot where they dropped off the SuperGoose last time. Ron said the guard would be expecting him. Ralph said he'd have to come by himself, since Sam was busy with their two boys. Ron asked if 10:00 Saturday morning would be OK, and Ralph said "sure, see ya then."

When Ron got off the phone, he called Bear, and asked him if they could spare 2 of the SOPMOD M - 4 kits, and a couple of cases of grenades. Bear asked whom it was for, and Ron told him it was for Ralph and Sam. Bear knew they were ER trained docs, and would be worth their weight in gold if TSHTF, so he said "Heck Yeah, I'll take 2 kits from the armory in Allakaket and 2 bandoleers full of 40mm HE grenades. Anything we can do for those 2 is OK by me."

"Doc and I are building a hunting lodge behind our cabin, it's also going to be their bug-out retreat if TSHTF."

"We should get them to train with our militia, and ask if they want to cross-train our medics."

"We're going to see them tomorrow, want to come with us?"

"I'll be there, when are you going to leave?"

"Ralph's picking us up at 1000, so we need to be out of Allakaket at 0800, can you get 007 to fly you to Allakaket by 0800?"

"Sure, I'll bring some toys they might want, I mean if we're already giving them weapons that would put them away for a long time if caught with them, they might as well go for the whole shooting match."

"Just make sure you don't blow us up en route."

"That shouldn't be a problem; they're in their original shipping crates."

"Ok, see you at 0800 at the airport."

Ron asked Nancy if she wanted to see Ralph & Sam's new house in Anchorage, and their two boys. Nancy thought he meant "now" and almost flattened him in her haste to get to the door. Ron quickly explained that he meant Saturday. She apologized for running him over, and asked why she was telling him now. Ron said that they needed Anne to babysit since they were bringing some "presents" to them that he didn't want the kids anywhere near. Nancy picked up on his euphemism, and suggested they call Anne and Gene right now. Ron called, and Anne said "Anne's Babysitting service, whom do you need sat on?"

Ron tried not to laugh, and asked his mom if they could take the kids Saturday. They were going to see Ralph and Sam, and give them some presents they didn't want the kids around. Gene had filled Anne in on some of the toys they had stashed around Allakaket, and agreed she didn't want the kids anywhere near them either. All she needed is for Jake or Josh to pull the pin on a grenade, and blow their whole family to smithereens. Ron said they would drop them off early Saturday, so Anne said she'd get Gene's lazy butt up early so they were decent. Ron was having a hard time not laughing, and finally said "bye mom" before she tried harder to make him laugh. He told Nancy they were all set, and got ready for tomorrow.

Saturday morning, getting the kids and the 2 dogs into the truck was as easy as opening the front door, and saying "we're going to Grandma's house!" 10 minutes later, Jake and Josh at least waited for the truck to stop before running into Anne's arms, followed by Starsky and Hutch, and Sarah and David. Gene was amazed at how big Starsky and Hutch had gotten since the last time he saw them. Jake and Josh were getting big too. Ron and Nancy hugged Anne and Gene respectively, and got back into the truck, saying they should be home by tonight. Bear was waiting for them with several crates already loaded on the SuperGoose, and the turbines idling. They parked and climbed aboard the SuperGoose. Bear told them, "If I were you, I'd land and take-off real gently!" Ron took the hint, no Max performance take-offs or rough landings unless he wanted to go "Boom!" He called the tower, and was given take-off clearance while he taxied out to the lake. Ron took off gently, and cruise-climbed to 2,000 feet. He called Anchorage control about 2 hours later, and got clearance to land and taxi over to Alaska Airlines VIP terminal. When he got to the AA VIP lot, a ground crewman guided him into a slot, and they shut down. As soon as the props stopped spinning, Ralph's green Suburban cruised up next to the cabin door, and they soon had the boxes transferred. Ralph gave Ron and Nancy a big hug, and Ron introduced Bear. Ralph remembered who he was, and gave him a hug too. They all piled into the Suburban for the drive back to Ralph and Sam's house. From the outside, Ron thought their house was large but unremarkable. The closer he got, the more intrigued he was. Finally he blurted out "Ralph, were you trying to build a fortress - because you succeeded."

"I call it a "Stealth Fortress. It looks like a normal house from a distance, but as you can see, this house could stop 30 caliber rifle fire all day, and maybe .50 caliber fire."

Bear said "I guess what we brought will fit right in. I hope you have a cart, or someone's going to have a hernia."

Ralph got their heavy duty cart, and they loaded the cases and boxes onto it. Ralph thought the boxes were exceptionally heavy, and knew better to ask about it until they were behind closed doors. Once they were in the foyer, Ralph told Bear to take a right, and he reached up, slid a picture aside, and entered a code on the pad, and a door clicked open, and a freight elevator hummed to a stop.”

“You’ve got a freight elevator?”

“Beats the alternative!”

They rolled the cart onto the elevator, and Ralph pressed the down button. 2 minutes later it stopped, and the door opened onto their basement. Ron and Nancy were amazed at what they saw; they had a complete survival shelter with most of the stuff they did. Bear was glad to see they were a little thin on the armaments department, and knew what he was bringing in would help. Once they were all out of the elevator, Sam gave Ron and Nancy a big hug, and said she was in the middle of feeding her boys, and would catch them later, and hurried back upstairs. Curiosity got the better of Ralph, and he asked “so what did you bring us.”

Bear said, “This stuff is on long-term loan, but feel free to use it.” Then he took out his Ka-bar and pried open the cases. The first thing out was the SOPMOD M - 4 kits in a padded steel case. The next case included the 40mm Grenades for the M - 203 in the kits. The next case contained 12 Claymores. Ralph realized that if they got caught with this stuff, Hell would freeze over before they got out of prison.

“Why are you giving us all this stuff?”

Bear said “The M - 4 is a Class III weapon, its Full Auto, so even having it was enough to put you away for 20 years or more. Since you were in for a penny, I thought I’d give you some stuff to really defend this place if TSHTF, and if this isn’t enough, I can have either Ron pick you up in the SuperGoose if things are fairly calm, or one of our armed 007 helicopters, or if things really are FUBAR, I can send the Super Stallion armed with 7.62 GE Mini-guns and an assault team to get you and yours out of here, and to the hunting lodge/Bug-Out retreat Doc and Ron are building right behind their lodge at HelpmeJack Lake. No one is getting anywhere near there without either a lot of work, a helicopter, or an Amphibian. And even if they did, we need to show you some stuff General Shepard gave us right before he retired and moved to Allakaket.”

“General Shepard retired to Allakaket - This I gotta see! I wanted to thank him anyway; those Federal CCW’s saved our lives at least once.”

“You’re going to be in for a bigger shock. Gene, that’s General Shepard’s first name, married my mom a little while ago, and he’s now the Senior Pistol champion at our Company Indoor Shooting range and pool complex.”

“Must be nice to have the bucks?”

“It’s not bad, but when Doc moved to Allakaket after selling the mansion, he made BA and I look like paupers. He’s putting up half the money to build what we’re calling Doc’s Lodge behind our lodge at HelpmeJack Lake. We need to take you guys there as soon as you’d like, maybe early next summer after the snow melts, and before the hunters arrive.”

Ralph took a closer look at the box of grenades, and realized they were High Explosive grenades and said “Holy Hand grenades Batman!”

Ron quipped “Sorry Ralph, wrong movie. I think the “Holy Hand Grenade was in Monty Python and the Holy Grail!”

Ralph turned out to be a Monty Python fan, and came back with “She turned me into a Newt!” in a perfect Cockney accent.

They were both laughing themselves silly as Bear stood there wondering WTF. It seems Bear was the wrong generation to have seen much Monty Python, and didn’t get the joke. Ron decided to move on instead of explaining things. Bear handed Ralph a box full of field manuals covering the M -4 SOPMOD kit, the M -203 40mm Grenade launcher and grenades, and the Claymore mines. Bear noticed that Ralph had cleared all the trees and shrubbery around his house that could provide cover in a firefight, but neglected to cut firing ports into his shutters, or make prepared fighting holes. Bear took Ralph aside, and kindly pointed those deficiencies out. Ralph took it as Bear meant it, and asked for help, since George decided to stay in Atlanta and build his militia. They walked outside, and Ralph was carrying a clipboard and a legal pad, and writing down everything Bear suggested. Bear said that if he planted planters far enough away from the house, and about 3-4 feet high, and made them out of thick timbers, they could stand behind the planters and shoot, except if whoever was attacking them had grenades of some type, they could loft them between the planter and the wall, and create a killing zone. If they fought from inside the house, and cut cross-shaped slots in the shutters, they could shoot through the windows, from behind bulletproof cover, and it would take a LAWS rocket or RPG to punch through their walls.

Ralph said that the house wasn’t designed to stand up to a military assault, just stop looters and Dirtbags from killing them, since they probably wouldn’t be armed with anything heavier than 30 caliber weapons. If it got that bad, they’d contact Bear or Ron, and request an evacuation.

Bear stopped him dead in his tracks when he asked “How?”

Ralph had never considered that. If things were totally FUBAR, the cell system, phones, and the internet would probably be toast. He had no ideas for long-distance comms.

Bear suggested they get their Ham radio license, put radios in both vehicles, and a base station

in the basement, with enough power to reach Allakaket. Ralph said he'd look into that ASAP. Bear said most of the information he needed was on the Amateur Radio Relay League or ARRL website. <http://www.arrl.org>

Ralph walked over to his computer, and 15 minutes later, knew more than he ever wanted to about Amateur Radio. He decided that the 2-meter handy talkies and 50-watt mobile radios would be sufficient for local communications, and a multi-band transceiver would be necessary to get onto the HF frequencies to reach Allakaket over 300 miles away. He also discovered that both he and Sam would have to have licenses and at least pass the Tech requirements. Later, he'd need a General to gain HF privileges so he could reach Allakaket. Ralph asked Bear if he had a clue how long it was before he thought that the stinky stuff would hit the rotating blade. Bear laughed and said that his crystal ball was in the shop, but if he were Ralph, he'd get fully certified in Ham radio ASAP, since it was tough to use voice on the HF frequencies.

Later that afternoon, Bear helped Ralph repack his kits in his vehicle, so he could get his medical and first aid stuff out without accidentally displaying the M -4 setup. Bear repacked the M -4 kit, and took several items out that they couldn't use without NVG's or couldn't use with the M -203 mounted (which it was), which made room for 10 loaded 30-round magazines, and 6 40mm grenades. Nancy and Sam spent the time getting caught up, and Sam was pumping Nancy for information about how to raise kids, especially boys, since these two were driving her out of her mind. Nancy said that controlled panic was normal, and the best thing she could do was get them on a routine, and don't deviate from that unless necessary. She said having a baby-proof "Kid room" helped. Nancy said it was up to them, but a good dog was a great babysitter, once the kids were old enough to know not to pull its ears or tail to see if they came off. Sam was laughing her head off, imagining that, and then she realized why Nancy had said it. Pulling on a dog's ears or tail was a good way to get bit, and dogs normally bit to punish by biting the face, which didn't really hurt a puppy, but could scar a kid for life. Nancy said installing a whole-house video monitoring system was a good idea to keep an eye on the kids, and see who's coming up the driveway. Sam said she was going to get Ralph to get one installed ASAP. Later that afternoon, Ron, Ralph, and Bear made an appearance, spent some time with Sam and Nancy, and then Ron said they needed to get home if they wanted to land at Allakaket in daylight. Nancy wasn't too keen on landing in the dark so she agreed. Ralph said he'd drive them back to the airport, and he'd be back later. Sam kissed him goodbye, and they were out the door. On the way there Ron, Ralph, and Bear all exchanged contact information so they could get in touch with each other. Ralph gave them all a hug when he dropped them off next to the SuperGoose, and they climbed aboard. Ron dropped Bear off at his place, and landed in Allakaket with barely enough daylight to call it a daylight landing. He used the landing light again because he had it, and it didn't hurt to use it in twilight conditions. When they got to the truck, Ron called his mom to let them know they were home. Anne said they sounded tired, and she already had the kids fed and in their PJs so they could keep them overnight. Ron didn't argue, and thanked his Mom. Ron and Nancy went home and crashed since they were exhausted. They picked up the kids the next morning, and spent the rest of the day goofing off.

When Ralph got home, he contacted a local ARRL-affiliated radio club and talked to Virgil, their President, who was a total Elmer. When Ralph told him what he was planning on installing, he suggested a 100-foot tower, which would increase his transmit and receive range for the Kenwood TS-480SAT Multiband radio he wanted. He agreed that the Kenwood G-707A/E would make a great, but pricey mobile unit, and the THG71A was a really durable handheld, with dual-band capability, but to get the bigger battery, and the Cigarette Lighter Adapter for it, since it ate up battery power on high power. He thought Ralph's idea to connect a 100Ah AGM-type deep cycle battery to his battery bank with a big diode to keep the bank from discharging the battery would work as good as or better than buying a Regulated Power Supply for several hundred dollars, and it could extend the use of his radio for several hours even if he lost his battery bank. Virgil suggested a local radio shop that could install everything, and didn't gouge members of the local radio club.

Ralph asked how he joined, and Virgil said the dues were \$25.00 per year per family, but they both had to have their FCC Technician licenses first. He mailed Ralph a spare copy of the ARRL book "Now you're talking" and suggested taking the practice tests to find out what areas they were weak in, the test was pass/fail, and fairly easy if you knew anything about basic electronics. To transmit on his HF radio, he'd want a General ticket to take full advantage of the radio's capabilities, which required copying Morse code at 5wpm. Ralph said he'd probably use Packet Radio comms, since they were quicker. Virgil explained that Morse code was a FCC requirement, and he had to have it to transmit on most of the HF frequencies. Ralph said ok, and asked how long it would take to get their Tech licenses. Virgil said it usually took a month or two to study, then they could schedule a test session, and usually within a week of taking the test, they had their license registered with the FCC, and they were good to go. The club met once a month at the local café, and did a club-wide Net on the radio Wednesday evenings from about 8:00 to 8:30. Virgil told Ralph to call him with any questions, but try to look it up in the book first, and to call him when they were ready to take their Technician License test.

Ralph walked upstairs, and talked with Sam. She agreed that Ham Radios would be way more useful in an emergency than Cellular phones, because 1) If the Cell Phones worked, they would probably be jammed with emergency calls, and 2) Both the regular phone service and the Cellular Network had to be working for Cellular calls to go through, and 3) The Club's 2-meter and 440MHz band repeater network had an auto-patch feature into the phone system for emergencies. Ralph told her that Virgil had loaned them his study guide for the technician license. Ralph knew quite a bit about electronics, but Sam didn't have a clue. Ralph offered to tutor her in Electronics so she could pass the test. Virgil admitted if you bombed the questions on FCC regulations, but got all the rest right, you'd still pass easily, since there was only 3-5 questions on FCC regulations in the test, and the rest was basic electronics, safety, and common-sense questions. If they spent a month and really studied, they could probably ace the test. Ralph helped Sam feed the boys, and get them to bed, then they started studying for the test. Ralph was impressed, Sam seemed to pick up on this quickly. She told him that she had always been good at Math, and formulas were a walk in the park for her. The rest of the test information was rote memorization, but after they read it through a couple of times, they figured

out where the critical information was, and were ready to go in 2 weeks when they both aced the practice tests. Ralph called Virgil, and said they could set up a test date next Saturday. Ralph asked what to do about their two infant sons. Virgil said his wife Marge would come along so she could babysit them for the test session. They had another room where they could stay in their car seats and hopefully sleep through the testing session. Ralph asked Sam, and asked how long the testing session lasted. It was only an hour or so, so Sam thought that would be OK.

Ralph and Sam packed Bert and Larry up in their car seats, and loaded the Suburban full of kid stuff, and drove to the test site. Marge was more than happy to watch the kids, and Sam decided it would be OK. An hour later, they both passed their Technician license exams, and would be good to go in a week or two. Ralph wrote a check for the 2 exam fees, and 1 year's membership in the Anchorage Amateur Radio Club. Virgil handed him a receipt for the membership dues, and suggested they show it to Tom at the radio store. It might be cheaper to buy the radios through him than to pay to have them shipped to Alaska, besides, if there was anything wrong, it would save them the shipping back to the lower 48. Ralph called Tom, and said he was a new member of the AARC, and got pretty reasonable quotes for all his radio gear, antennas, and installation. Tom told Ralph that he had a used tower out back that he could sell Ralph cheap as long as he installed it, since he needed to climb up the tower to install his base station antennas. Even though they rarely got major thunderstorms in Anchorage, Tom suggested an antenna switch with a lightning grounding system that also protected the system against EMP. That got Ralph's attention, and he asked Tom to bring a 4-position switch plus ground, and enough Coax cable to install 4 antennas on the tower, even though he only was going to use 2 for now. Tom said he had a 150Ah 12vdc Concorde VRLA battery in stock, that was sitting in his shop for 3 months when a customer ordered it and changed his mind. Tom said he'd sell it for 10% below his cost installed, because if he kept it another 90 days, it would be impossible to sell. Ralph asked what his normal selling price was, and realized he was selling the battery for an effective 50% discount if he included delivery and installation. Ralph asked if he had a large blocking diode to keep the battery from discharging back into the battery bank. Tom said he'd throw one in at no charge. Ralph decided to go ahead and give Tom all his business, and Tom said he'd call him when the radios were in to set up the installation. Ralph asked him if he could pay for everything now except the installation labor, and Tom said he'd drop his price by 10% if he could, so Ralph gave Tom his credit card number, and Tom e-mailed Ralph a receipt showing all the radios and parts were paid in full, and a quote for the installation labor.

2 weeks later, Tom called and said the radios were in. Ralph asked if he could install the radios in the vehicles Saturday morning. Tom said he usually didn't work Saturdays, but he'd come in for Ralph since he was a Doctor, and couldn't get off during the week. The next Saturday morning, Ralph dropped off the IH Traveler, and walked next door to the coffee shop, since Tom said it would only take an hour. When Ralph came back, the radio was installed, and Tom was programming it with all the repeater frequencies for this section of Alaska, and entering the repeater name into the memory, since the radio had an alphanumeric memory. Tom handed him

a printout showing the names and locations of all the repeaters in the county, and the names and locations of nearby area repeaters for Tok and Whitehorse. Ralph asked him if he had time to install the other mobile radio, and Tom said he'd need an hour for a lunch break. Ralph replied that it would take him that long to drive home and back, since he was on the other side of Anchorage. An hour later, Ralph drove up in the Suburban, and it barely fit in Tom's work bay. Ralph went next door to read a book and kill an hour, and when he came back, Tom was finished everything including programming the mobile and both handy talkies. He said that he'd program the 3rd mobile radio when he came over next Saturday to install the base station system and the antenna. He suggested that Ralph be ready for him at 0800 Saturday morning, since it was an all-day job. Ralph checked to make sure the radios were on the seat, shook Tom's hand, and said he'd see him next Saturday at 0800, and backed out of his shop.

When Ralph got home, their licenses had come in the mail, and they decided to check out their radios. They set both of their hand-held radios to the closest repeater, and Ralph jogged out to the driveway, and keyed his microphone. "KO7CXY calling KO7CZY, how do you copy?"

"Copy 5x5, full quieting."

"Roger, I'll be back in a second, let me try the mobiles in both vehicles."

After 2 more radio checks, Ralph knew all 4 radios worked perfectly, and came back inside. Next week Tom would be over to install their radio antenna tower, and both base station radios. Since Ralph didn't have his General yet, he decided to go with 4 dual-band omni antennas instead of 1 multi-band antenna, leaving 2 slots open on the antenna switch. He wanted 1 high-gain antenna, and 1 long-wire dipole antenna for the HF frequencies. The 2-meter was going to be connected to a $\frac{1}{2}$ -wave omni antenna since it would be mounted high enough that he could take advantage of the $\frac{1}{2}$ -wave propagation characteristics. Ralph wanted 1 high-gain antenna to reach Allakaket, but was worried about wind load. Tom said he had some tricks up his sleeve that could get him a 9-12dB gain with a low sail area to minimize wind load on the tall tower.

Chapter 51 - Now You're Talking

Tom called back the next day, and said in his best Don Corleone Voice "I'm gonna make you an offer you can't refuse!"

Ralph came back as Clint Eastwood "Go Ahead, Make my day!"

Tom was laughing so hard he couldn't talk, finally he managed to say "I found a used Gap Titan DX, it was still mounted to the tower I was going to sell you. They're worth around \$350 new, so I'll sell it to you for \$250 and guarantee it works. The Gap Challenger DX I was going to sell you costs more than \$250 just for shipping, it's so big and heavy. I'll throw in a 1/2-wave 2-meter/440 antenna I have so you have all your bands covered."

Ralph decided to be a character, switched voices to Dom DeLuise (as Don Giovanni) "I accept your offer of friendship."

Tom decided to forego any Tomfoolery and get serious. "Ok, see you at 8:00 Saturday!"

Ralph could not resist, and said "Hasta La Vista, Baby!"

Tom hung up before things got any punnier.

Saturday morning arrived, and Ralph was ready when Tom drove up at 0800 in a F-450 pickup towing a huge flatbed trailer with the disassembled tower on it. Right behind him was a utility truck with a light-duty hydraulic crane to lift the assembled tower. Tom showed him where he thought the tower should go, and Ralph was surprised that Tom wanted it so far from the house. "Ralph, these antennas will be kicking out tons of RF energy, you don't want that anywhere near your wife and kids. Besides, I brought a whole roll of 50-ohm coax and some plastic conduit to bury the line in. You said that you wanted your ham shack in the basement. I hope you planned ahead for that?"

"I had them install a 2" conduit just for radio cables and stuff. There's a threaded cap right over there painted bright orange." Tom fired up his compressor, and bolted the tower together using an air ratchet, and an air impact wrench set to 80 foot pounds for the final torque. His assistant grabbed the 6" gas powered auger and bored 3 holes 6-foot deep to bury the footings, and mixed a bag of quick-drying concrete. With help from the crane, they muscled the base unit over to the holes, and sunk the legs in 6 feet deep, and filled the holes with quick-drying concrete. He bored 3 more holes about 20 feet away for guy wire anchors. By the time Tom had the tower together, the concrete was set enough to work, and he hooked the cable of the crane to the balance point of the tower, and while the crane lifted the tower, the 4 of them muscled it into place. Once the bolts slipped home, Tom drove the nuts home with the air impact wrench. "Now for the fun stuff" said Tom as he put on his safety harness and tool belt.

They connected the crane's lift hook to the antenna and extended the boom to its maximum length and height. While Tom climbed the tower with his climber's safety belt, the crane operator slowly lifted the antenna aloft to match. Once they reached the top, Tom secured himself, and fastened the brackets to the top of the tower, and connected the base of the antenna at 3 points to the tower. The operator let the cable slack, which released it from the antenna, and he lowered it all the way to the ground, and lifted the coax cable with the PL-259 connector on it up to Tom, who tightened the connection, then zip-tied the cable to the tower every 6 feet as he descended. 80 feet above ground, he connected the dual-band omni-directional 2-Meter/440Mhz antenna and coax cable to a 6-foot stand-off to keep it from interacting with the tower, and keep it out of the path of any ice falling from the Titan antenna above. When he got to the 75 foot level, he attached the guy connectors, and the crane hauled the guy wires aloft, and he secured guy wires to each of the 3 legs of the tower. He kept securing the coax cables as he descended, and stopped when he was 6-feet above ground. When he got on the ground, he took off his tool belt and safety harness, saying he was glad that was over, and his assistant filled the 3 holes with concrete, and stuck the guy wire anchor bolts into the concrete.

Tom said they'd have to wait a week for the concrete to get to full strength before they could fully tighten the guy wires, so they were going to leave them loose for now. They connected the guy wires to the anchors with adjustable turnbuckles, and attached orange Surveyor's tape to the wire every couple of feet from ground to about 10 feet in the air. Tom grabbed a huge copper-clad grounding rod, and drove it 8 feet into the ground with a fence post driver close to the tower, then he attached a heavy-gauge grounding wire to the tower, and ran it down to the rod. The tower was now grounded in case of lightning, and as soon as the concrete set, they'd come back and fully tension the guy wires. They adjourned to the basement to install the radios while his assistant used the Ditch Witch to dig a trench from the tower to the conduit outlet. Tom connected the 12vdc battery bank power lead to the huge AGM-type deep-cycle battery, and installed a large blocking diode and a 50amp fuse on the positive lead between the battery and the bank, then he connected the radios to the battery using the included in-line fuses. After he finished digging the trench, the assistant fed 5 color-coded coax cables through the conduit from the tower to the house, then fed them into the basement, adding a huge grounding cable. He drove a grounding rod into the ground next to the house and connected the grounding cable to it.

Tom connected the 2-meter/440 antenna coax cable with a PL-259 directly to the Kenwood G-707A/E, so he had enough room on the antenna switch for 3 additional antennas for the Kenwood TS-480SAT Multiband radio, but Tom doubted he would need any more. Once everything was connected, Tom connected a SWR meter between the G-707 and the antenna cable, and ran several tests to make sure the SWR was below 2:1. When it tested around 1.5:1, Tom told Ralph that he had a darn near perfect setup, and he shouldn't have any antenna problems, and if his transmissions got noisy, he could borrow the SWR meter, and if the SWR was above 2:1, he had a problem. Since the TS-480 had a built-in antenna tuner, it was not necessary to check the SWR, but he did it anyway, and it was also below 2:1. Tom connected the grounding cable to the antenna switch, and showed Ralph how to use everything. He looked

at his watch, and it was almost 5:00, so he said he had to get home for dinner, and packed everything up and left, telling Ralph he'd be back next Saturday to adjust the guy wires and check everything. He made Ralph promise not to transmit on any HF bands he wasn't authorized for until he got his General, and Ralph assured him that if he heard Ralph on a HF frequency, it would be an emergency, unless he really got into DX'ing.

Ralph had better things to do with his time than talk to a stranger in Australia he'd never see again. Some Hams were into DX, but Ralph was a preparedness nut, and was willing to go to the extra expense to have a means of emergency comms, and would only practice enough to stay current so he could communicate in an emergency. Ron realized Sam needed a General too, since he might be stuck at work during an emergency, and she'd need to use the radio. On the other hand, if it was an emergency, all the rules went out the window as far as the FCC was concerned. Ralph e-mailed Ron and told him he had long-range HF capability, and they arranged several emergency frequencies and protocols. The Airport tower at Allakaket as well as Ron, BA, and Bear had long-range HF sets for emergency use, so one of them should hear the message, and be able to pass it on to the correct party.

Ralph realized it had been over a month since he last practiced shooting with his pistol, and checked the yellow pages for a nearby indoor shooting range. The closest range was Alaska Guns, but when Ralph called, a nice guy named Jim said they had recently moved and were in the process of remodeling, and they planned on having a nice 7-lane shooting range adjacent to the new store some time next year. He suggested the Fish and Game range, since the nearest indoor range was in Palmer, over 40 miles north of them. He called the phone number for the Rabbit Creek range, and found out it was a rifle range. The only place he knew for sure that he could shoot his pistols until Alaska Guns finished their range was the range at Allakaket, or Bear's range. Either one was a 2-hour plane ride away. Ralph realized that unless he flew to Allakaket, his pistol-shooting skills would deteriorate until the other range was built. Ralph went upstairs to spend some quality time with Sam, Bert, and Larry. Ralph noticed Sam didn't seem so stressed, and chalked it up to Sam talking to Nancy, and getting some tips from the "old pro." Sam asked Ralph if he wanted to have a dog, since Nancy said a good dog was invaluable as a playmate and babysitter. Ralph pointed out that he didn't have time to take care of it during the day while he was working, and a puppy would be almost as troublesome as another child. Sam told Ralph that since she talked to Nancy, she didn't feel so stressed, since most of her stress came from not knowing what to expect, since she was an only child, without a mother to advise her on child-rearing techniques. Thankfully Nancy volunteered to help whenever possible, and if she needed to she should call her if she needed something right now. Ralph marveled at the lengths Ron and Nancy were willing to go to help them. He asked Sam about it and Sam admitted that Ron probably loved her, but wasn't in love with her, and Nancy saw her as a younger sister. They were probably closer than most friends now due to the incident at their wedding. Ralph had to admit that risking your life to save a friend was pretty high up on the Friends totem pole. Ralph was really grateful for Ron and Nancy, and hoped one day to be able to return the favor. Ralph helped Sam diaper his sons and feed them dinner, then he reheated some Crawfish Gumbo he had in the freezer. He liked making a big pot of Gumbo

or Jambalaya and freezing the leftovers for later. They even bought a big chest freezer so they would have room to do that when Sam thought that was an excellent idea, since she liked Cajun food too! While he reheated dinner, Sam put the kids down for the night, and took a shower. Ralph said grace, then after dinner they cuddled on the couch until Sam whispered in Ralph's ear, and he picked her up and carried her to the bedroom.

Chapter 52 - First Snow

Luckily Ralph took Ron's advice and got their vehicles ready early for winter. His Traveler had an engine block heater, but the mechanic wanted to add a fuel tank heater, explaining it didn't do any good to have warm oil if the fuel had jelled. Ralph was pleasantly surprised to find that the heaters weren't that expensive, and had Sam's Suburban checked. Both vehicles already had recovery and repair kits and chains, so they were set. The mechanic drained their summer fluids, and replaced the windshield washer fluid with Arctic grade fluid, and made sure the radiator fluids and oil were fresh. He drained and replaced the transmission fluid on Sam's Suburban and replaced the gear oil in both differentials and the transfer case. He knew that Ralph's Traveler just had the diffs and transfer case serviced, so he just topped them off. Ralph asked if the Suburban should get a tune-up, then he realized that Ralph was just playing with him. He told Ralph "Don't laugh, I personally know of some mechanics that charged someone with a diesel for a tune-up." Ralph was surprised when Ron called and said he was flying to Anchorage, and had a couple of packages for them, and he needed to meet Ron at the Alaska Air VIP terminal in an hour.

An hour later, Ron taxied up to the terminal, and when he shut down, he opened the door. Ralph backed the Suburban up and dropped the tailgate. Ron handed him several boxes of jars. Ralph remembered they never picked up the canned caribou meat that was the last thing he remembered Bert doing. Then Ron handed him a big package, saying there were all 5 caribou skins in there, since Doc didn't want his from that year, and his family had more than they needed. He suggested taking one of the skins and making knee-high lace-up boots with vibram soles with the fur out, saying they would be the warmest boots he'd ever worn, but they weren't waterproof. He told Ralph of a good boot maker that was quick and relatively inexpensive. With Sam pregnant again, they should make a nice loose maternity dress for her, and if she made the bodice lace up like Anne did, she could nurse with it on. Ron almost suggested a shirt and pants combo for Ralph, but figured he would get laughed off the planet if he showed up in Anchorage wearing that. Instead, he suggested a knee-length nightshirt that he could wear over polypro longjohns around the house. Ralph almost made a crack about guys and dresses, and decided against it, he'd wear sweat pants under it. He thanked Ron and asked him if he could come to the house. Ron said he would like to, but was here to pick up the weekly delivery since Steve was sick, and he had to get back to Allakaket. They shook hands, and Ron got back into the SuperGoose and taxied over to the delivery terminal, where the driver was waiting for him. Half an hour later, he was in the air flying back to Allakaket with a full plane.

Ralph drove home and showed Sam what Ron had delivered. For some reason, Sam was crying when Ralph showed her the caribou meat. He put the package of skins down and held his wife until she stopped crying. Together they put the cases of canned caribou meat up in their storage, and then Ralph showed her the skins, and told her Ron's suggestions. She was taken aback at Ron's suggestion for the lace-up bodice, but remembered she told Nancy what a hassle it was to breast feed with a regular bra. Nancy told her that if she were at home, forget the bra,

and if she had a caribou skin maternity gown like Anne and Nancy did, it was a lot easier to unlace the bodice and go ahead and nurse. Sam had enough problems with Ralph keeping his hands off her; she hoped he wouldn't take her open bodice as an invitation. She really didn't mind, it's just with two energetic boys and a 3rd boy on the way, she was really tired most of the time. She told Ralph that if he bought her a sewing machine and some heavy denim needles, she could make a maternity gown and a night shirt easy enough. She thought the caribou skin boots were an excellent idea, and remembered Nancy saying how warm they were.

The next day they drove to the boot maker's shop, with Bert and Larry in their child-seat carriers. He measured their feet and legs, and said the knee-high lace-up boots would be \$200 per pair if he could keep the leftovers from a caribou skin, because he could make 3 pairs of boots out of 1 skin, and this one was huge and in excellent shape. Ralph said that it was taken over by HelpmeJack Lake, and Ron Williams brain tanned it for him. He was impressed, the only people who brain-tanned skins anymore were the Inuit people who still lived in their tribal villages. Ralph told him to make sure that the boots were hair side out. He noted that on the work order, and showed them what he used for soles and inner soles. The inner sole was heavily insulated with a Mylar layer to reflect heat and keep the foot warmer, and the sole was a heavy Vibram stitch-on sole with a deep lug pattern, so he could re-sole them for \$25 per pair. When they finished, they stopped at the sporting goods shop Ron shopped at, and bought a bunch of polypro longjohns, knee-high socks, and glove liners. They bought a dozen pairs of their warmest knee-high wool hiking socks as well. Sam saw a pair of Shearling indoor boots and bought 2 pairs, 1 for her, and 1 for Ralph, since she doubted he wanted to wear his big monster boots inside the house. They tried them on first, and they fit like gloves. The manager recommended either wearing them barefoot, or with a polypro liner, since the natural lanolin in the wool was good for their feet. Finally, they drove over to Wal-mart and bought a Brother sewing machine and a bunch of denim needles, since the clerk said the denim needles would get dull from punching through the caribou skins. She recommended a heavyweight Dacron thread, and sold Sam a 3-yard length of round leather lace for the lace-up bodice. Looking at Sam's pregnant form, she suggested a round style bodice, and handed her a pattern she said would fit her better. Sam was uncomfortable with her new "Jane Mansfield" body as she called it, but Ralph didn't complain!

Later when they got home, Sam put Bert and Larry down for a nap, and decided she needed one too. Ralph joined her, and sensing she was exhausted, just cuddled up next to her, and they were both soon fast asleep.

The next morning Ralph woke up and looked out the window. "Sam, what the heck is this?" Sam got up and looked out the window "Rafe, it's snowing out!"

"I kind of figured that, any idea how long it's going to snow?"

"Why not look it up on the internet, or tune one of the ham radios to the NOAA weather broadcast." Ralph thought "Duh..." and walked over to where his Kenwood HT was sitting on

the charger, turned it on, and switched through the frequencies until he heard "Anchorage and vicinity will experience 3-5 inches of snowfall in the next 24 hours, winds are expected not to exceed 15mph, so visibility will remain fair. No chain or snow tire restrictions posted yet, but be prepared. This is NOAA Weather radio..."

Ralph turned the radio off, he had heard enough. He wondered why it was warm inside while it was snowing out, and remembered the heater must have kicked in, and was keeping the place comfortably warm. He put on his shearling booties and his sweats, and made a pot of coffee. He watched the snow fall for a while, then made breakfast, and got the boy's breakfast ready. Sam was wearing her sweat suit with the zip-up top since Larry wasn't totally weaned yet. Sam told him she was glad she bought these booties, since this was the warmest her feet had been in a while. Ralph was glad today was Sunday, so he didn't have to go to work until tomorrow. After he helped Sam feed the boys, he got on the internet, and checked the extended forecast. What he saw made him almost want to move back to Atlanta. The high the rest of the week was only 40 degrees! Besides that, they were forecasting snow the rest of the week. Sam walked in and said "Get used to it - it can snow most of the winter around here, and the winters can be 6 months long!" Ralph thought about that, and remembered they were prepared for snow - they didn't buy the Suburban and the Traveler just because they were great off-road machines, they also were excellent in the snow. Ralph thought about work, and remembered they all parked in a secured parking garage with outlets for their vehicle heating systems. Ralph didn't need to double-check the winter gear in their vehicles; they were good to go- he had confirmed that for the 6th time last week. Sam reminded him he needed to make an overnight bag in case he got stuck at work. He packed 2 sets of greens, 2 changes of underwear, a toiletry kit, and battery powered alarm clock in case he had to sleep at work into a duffle bag that would just fit into his locker at work. Later that day, Ralph and Sam both practiced their CW so they could get their General. They were slowly getting it, and hopefully next spring, they'd both be ready for their FCC General License exam. He talked to Virgil on the radio once or twice a week, and he was amazed at how fast they were picking this up. Ralph would have had a major case of cabin fever if he wasn't working, but he couldn't wait for spring.

A couple of days later, the boot maker called and said their boots were done. They took the Suburban since it was easier to get Bert and Larry in and out of, not to mention the now obviously pregnant Samantha. Sam stayed in the car with the kids, and Ralph ran in and paid the boot maker with a check for \$400. The boot maker told him that if he came across any more skins like the last one he used, he'd pay \$500 each for them. Ralph said that they had 3 more skins at home, but his wife was making herself a maternity gown and a night shirt for him out of them, and anything that was left would probably be smaller pieces. He told Ralph to bring the pieces over, and he'd buy them if they were big enough to be useful. Ralph took his card and the boots, thanked him and left. On the way home he told Sam that the boot maker offered to buy any whole caribou skins for \$500 each and he'd even buy any larger pieces they had left over from her sewing project. Sam had just finished laying out the gown and the nightshirt, and told Ralph they'd have 1 whole skin and a large bag full of scraps left when they were through. Ralph asked her what she'd like to do, keep the skins, or buy something with the \$500. Sam

pointed out they were rolling in dough, and didn't need the money, so she wanted to keep the skins. Ralph thought "Pretty Smart!" and kept driving. The snow got thick enough that he decided to flip on the auxiliary lights, and was amazed at how well they lit the road. Oncoming cars started flashing their lights, so he shut off the driving lights, and ran with the fogs and headlights only. Still they really lit up the road ahead. When they got home, he decided he might need to use the snow blower tonight or tomorrow morning before work. They got out carefully, and carried the boys into the house, and Ralph knew he had a couple of hours of daylight left, so he took out the snow blower and cleared the driveway.

While Ralph cleared the driveway, Sam heated up dinner, fed the boys, and relaxed until Ralph came in reading her bible on the couch. She got up slowly from the couch, and gave Ralph a hug and a kiss.

"What's that for?"

"Just thought you'd like to warm up" Sam said seductively "but first, dinner's ready."

Ralph said grace, then they put the boys down for the night, and they settled on the couch. Ralph noticed Sam's glow, and said "Sam, you're especially beautiful when you're pregnant, you just glow."

She unzipped her top and said "and you don't mind my new Jane Mansfield figure either?"

"Not a bit!"

Ralph reached over, kissed her on the lips, then Sam whispered in his ear. She was too big to carry now, and he didn't want to risk dropping her, so they walked to the bedroom, and Ralph remembered one benefit of these long winter nights!

The next morning, Ralph got up, got dressed, and checked outside, sure enough, it was snowing again. He made some coffee, and went in to check on Sam. She wasn't in bed, when all of a sudden he heard a blood-curdling scream, then moaning coming from the bathroom. He ran to the door, and knocked "Sam, are you in there, are you OK?" All he could hear was a weak "Rafe, help, I miscarried!"

He opened the door to a nightmarish image of his wife on the toilet with blood running down her legs. He picked her up as gently as possible, carried her to bed, covered her with blankets, and called 911.

"This is Doctor Raphael Lacombe at 1911 South Caribou Dr. My wife's miscarried and is hemorrhaging. Get ALS here STAT. I'll leave the front door open."

"Roger Dr. Lacombe. Repeat 1911 South Caribou Dr. wife miscarried and hemorrhaging. ALS

en-route, ETA 30 minutes.”

Ralph got the front porch light on, unlocked the door, grabbed his medical kit, and went to check on Sam. She had all the signs of a mid-term miscarriage, including heavy bleeding and hemorrhaging. He couldn't stop the hemorrhage, since it was internal bleeding, so he started 2 liters of IV Ringer's Lactate wide-open, 1 in each arm to replace the lost blood volume. Sam's heart sounded OK considering, but her pulse was getting weak and thready like she was going into deep shock from the loss of blood.

“Sam, you've got to stay with me... You Hear Me!”

“Rafe, I love you, take care of the Boys!”

“Sam, you're going to make it, just hang on, I've got 2 liters of Ringer's in you to replace the lost blood volume, and ALS is only 10 minutes away.”

“Rafe, I love you, take care...”

As Samantha slowly lost consciousness, Ralph thought he was losing his wife, so he whispered to her, “Je t'aime Samantha, je prendrai soin des gosses. Je vous aimerai toujours!”

Chapter 53 - Awakening

Samantha woke up staring into a bright light. “Where am I?” she thought. As her vision cleared, she saw a familiar face. Her husband Ralph was standing over her saying “Samantha, wake up dear.”

She blinked her eyes and tried to talk, but her throat hurt too much from the airway they had just removed.

“Don’t try to talk, you’re in the recovery room at Alaska Regional Hospital. I love you, and I’ll see you later.”

Ralph left the room so his wife wouldn’t see him crying. Doc Nelson, who was the emergency surgeon on staff that day, had to perform a D&C and direct cauterization. Due to the scarring, they were pretty sure she couldn’t have any kids. Even still, they almost lost her twice after they got her into the hospital, and the Paramedics were amazed they got her that far. She had literally died twice on the table, and they brought her back.

Later that afternoon, Ralph was allowed to see her again. This time she could talk, although weakly. “Rafe, I was in heaven. I saw Jesus, Bert and our little boy Jacques.”

“Doc Nelson said you died twice on the table, but they brought you back.”

“I know, the second time Bert told me it wasn’t my time, and I had to go back, then I felt this intense pain, it must have been when they zapped me, then I woke up here, and you were looking at me.”

“I’m glad your alive Sam, I couldn’t live without you!”

“I’m not afraid of dying anymore. Heaven is so beautiful, it’s just amazing. Jesus had the sweetest smile on his face. He had little Jacques sitting on his lap. His mouth never moved, but I heard Jacques’ voice in my head saying “Mommy, I’m here on Jesus’ lap, and I’ll be here when you come back for good. I love you, and don’t worry about me. Then I felt this indescribably warm peace and love, and I heard Jesus’ voice telling me how much he loved me, but it wasn’t my time, that my race wasn’t finished yet. Finally I saw Bert, not as she was when she died, but as a young teenager. She was beautiful and full of love. She said that while she missed Doc, she knew they would be reunited soon. Then she told me I had to go back, and the next thing I know, I woke up here with you looking at me, I love you Rafe, and I never want to leave you again, but I know the next time I do, I’ll be in Heaven with Jesus forever.”

Despite the tubes sticking in her arms, Ralph held his wife and cried. They had 2 beautiful sons, and now he had his wife back, and losing the ability to have more kids was a small price

to pay for that. Ralph thanked God for returning his beloved wife to him, and thanked him for taking care of Jacques for them.

The next day when Ralph came in to see her, she didn't look too good, so he called the attending, and told him they needed to get her back into surgery, since she's probably having a post-operative infection of the uterus. Dr. Nelson came running in, took one look at her, and told them to prep her for immediate surgery, then he gave Ralph the good news/bad news. They probably caught it in time to save her life, but they should consider a hysterectomy since the last time he was in there, the scarring was so bad that even if she conceived, she couldn't carry to term. Ralph told him, "I'm going to the chapel to pray, you do whatever you feel is right." Ralph kissed his wife on the forehead, said "I love you", and squeezed her hand before they wheeled her into surgery. He walked to the Chapel, and was kneeling in prayer when he thought of the Second Book of Timothy, Chapter 1, verse 7 "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2Ti 1:7 NKJV) he knew Samantha was going to be OK, and he thanked God. When he got up, Dr. Nelson was standing there "We had to do a complete hysterectomy. It was the weirdest thing, I felt such peace, like I knew everything was OK."

"Dan, Sam and I are Born-Again Christians. Just now, I got done praying and even before you came in here, I knew she was OK."

"Wow, I'm a church-going Christian, but that rarely happens to me."

"Dan, any time you want to talk about it, just let me know. Thanks for saving Sam for me."

"Sure thing Ralph. Some weird things have been happening to me, and I'm getting the feeling God is trying to tell me something."

"I know he is! Do you want to pray about it?"

Dan looked around, and seeing no one there, nodded his head. Ralph put his hands on Dan's shoulders, and Dan felt a power and peace pouring through him. He wanted to get much closer to God, and stop just going to church, but to really live for God, and do what he wanted. When they finished, Dan gave Ralph a hug and said "Thanks Ralph, I don't know how, but it was like I was having a talk with God, and he showed me what I could do if I lived for him. It was awesome."

"Dan, your life is on a new path. Find a good bible-believing church, and make sure you keep reading your bible. If you need anything, or have any questions, feel free to call me." Ralph handed Dan his card, and walked into the Recovery room. When Sam woke up, Ralph told her everything was going to be all right. She said "I know" with a sweet Angelic smile. They got the infection under control, and she was ready to come home a week later. When she got home, the kids were fed, the house cleaned up, and Sam asked "Ok Rafe, fess up!"

"I did have a little help. Between people at our church who were constantly volunteering to help, then Ron and Nancy came over here for a couple of days while Anne watched their kids. We got it all covered. I made enough food to last 2 weeks in the freezer, and everything's taken care of. Sam gave Ralph a big hug and said "Thanks Rafe, you know I love you?"

"Not as much as I love you!"

"Wanna Bet?"

They held each other tightly, and Sam tried to outdo that kiss she laid on Ron when she left at the airport. When they came up for air, she was pretty sure she succeeded.

Ralph and Sam put the incident behind them, and concentrated on raising Bert and Larry. Once the docs said it was Ok to resume normal sexual relations, they did so - frequently now that there was no risk of pregnancy.

Later that spring, Ralph got a call from Ron inviting them to the Grand Opening of Doc's Lodge. He checked with work, and found out he was entitled to a week's vacation, so he called Ron back and set it up. Sam packed like Nancy used to for the trip. Ralph was just glad that they didn't have to carry this stuff very far. The day they were to meet Ron, they packed the Suburban and drove to the VIP terminal for Alaska Airlines. The gate guard gave them a parking pass to put on their dash, and an assigned space next to where Ron would park the SuperGoose. When he landed, Ron was all by himself. Sam ran up to him and hugged the stuffing out of him, then asked him where Nancy and the kids were. Ron explained they were already at their lodge, getting things set up for their "Summer at the Lodge" as they called it. Jake was now 16, Josh would be 15 soon, Sarah was 14, and David was 13, and they were all willing to help (Bear had bribed them with a daily trip to the range in the 007) so as soon as they got the SuperGoose loaded, they could open the lodge with their first "guests". Ron commented on the bags and bags of kids' clothes, commiserating with Ralph that Nancy used to do the same thing until Anne talked some sense into her. Ralph got a look from Sam when he asked if Anne were handy. Ron laughed his socks off. Sam belted Bert and Larry into their seats while Ron and Ralph loaded the aircraft. Once they were finished loading, Ron secured the cargo door and walked forward to the cockpit.

He taxied to the fuel pumps, topped off the tanks since they hadn't installed a fuel depot at HelpmeJack Lake yet - they fuel company refused to land at that "postage stamp" of a lake even after they saw Ron fly a perfect approach, and land with half the lake left over. If it became an issue, the Super Stallion could fly fuel bladders full of fuel from Allakaket to HelpmeJack Lake since the fuel company had no problems delivering to Allakaket. Ron thought that might be a good idea, and called BA on his sat phone. BA explained that the only reason for a fuel depot there was if the SuperGoose needed fuel, since the bush pilots had plenty of range to fly from Allakaket to any lodge or hunting area in that area of Alaska, and return to Allakaket to refuel. Ron argued that an emergency supply of fuel wouldn't be a bad idea, since each fuel bladder

carries 500 gallons and weighs 3,400 pounds full; two bladders would fill a 1,000 gallon tank, and give him enough fuel to fill the SuperGoose twice, or around 6,000 miles of emergency fuel at max fuel-efficiency cruise speed. BA knew where there were a couple of 2,000 gallon tanks that they could bury near the new hangar they installed at the lodge. If they added 1,000 gallons of Avgas, they could re-fuel a bunch of Bush planes with that, or run the lodge's ATV's. He said he'd crunch the numbers and get back to Ron. Since the sling-load limit for the Super Stallion was 34,000 pounds, they might be able to carry the bladders and the tanks in one load. Ron flew onward to Doc's lodge, blissfully unaware of all the work he made BA do just to follow up on his harebrained schemes.

2 hours later, they landed at HelpmeJack lake, and taxied up to the new hangar. Ron stopped short, and when the props stopped spinning, he opened the cockpit door, and opened the rear door to make unloading easier. His kids swarmed in, carting off the cases and boxes, putting them in the lodge under the watchful eyes of Doc Richards. Sam was amazed to see Doc there, then remembered it was his lodge, and he should be there for the grand opening. Jake and Sarah unbuckled Bert and Larry, and carried them inside the lodge, giving Ralph and Sam time alone with Doc. Sam hugged the stuffing out of Doc, and whispered in his ear that she saw Bert, and she'd explain later. Ralph hugged Doc too, then they went inside, since Doc wanted to say hi to his grandkids. Bert and Larry were crawling around on the bearskin rug in front of the huge lodge-style stone fireplace. Everyone had a very comfortable seat in the huge main room of the lodge. This one wasn't going to have trophy heads mounted on the walls, instead, they would take pictures of the hunters and fishermen with their catch and frame them on the walls, Nancy made an appearance finally, and Sam stood up to hug her too. Once they were all settled, Ron passed around glasses of sparkling cider, and Doc made a toast to officially open the lodge.

"Friends:

To those who've come and gone, and those who will grace this place, I offer love and friendship."

To shouts of "here, here" they drank a toast.

Later that afternoon, Sam explained what she had meant earlier, and Doc said "I know, I talk to her every night. I'm not getting any younger, and Ron tells me I'm worth \$30 million right now. If you guys want to move here, I'll give you half of it, and you can live in Allakaket. Even if you don't move, I still want to give you half of it now to keep the ##@\$# IRS from stealing it."

"I don't know what to tell you Doc. This blows me away, Ralph's getting tired of the long hours, and missing our boys grow up. This would be a perfect area to raise two boys. I'll have to ask Ralph, but right now, I want to give you another hug and a kiss on the cheek you old softie!" Samantha held Doc, then gave him a gentle motherly kiss on the cheek, then she went off to tell Ralph.

He was floored, and tempted to take him up on it. Things were really getting political at the hospital. He was more of an Administrator than a doctor lately, and he hated the paperwork. With \$15 Million, they could build a great house in Allakaket, and invest the money, and live off the interest. They both walked over to Doc, and he got another hug from Sam, and one from Ralph. They were both gushing about how nice he was until he held up his hand, and said "Don't make me out to be so noble, part of the reason I wanted you to move was so I could see my grandsons more than once every 6 months." At this point Ron walked in, and Doc filled him in on his plans. Ron told them about a beautiful lot that had just come on the market on the eastern edge of town, backed by 100 acres of prime timber. The owner only wanted \$50,000 for the land. Ron was going to put in an offer for it, but if they wanted it, it was theirs. Ralph turned to Doc, who said he could transfer the funds with a phone call, and Bill could put in the offer for them over the phone. Ralph thought that all he'd have to do was sell the house and quit work. There wasn't anything else tying them to Anchorage. He asked about moving their stuff, they had 2 very well equipped vehicles they wanted to keep, plus the contents of their houses. Ron said that if necessary, they'd fly the vehicles as sling loads using the Super Stallion, and they could fly all the stuff they wanted to bring with them to Allakaket. Ralph told Ron about his radio setup, and Ron suggested bringing it all, since if there were 4 people in town with long-distance capability, at least 1 of them should be able to communicate in an emergency. Ralph told Ron he had a 100-foot tower, and a 40-foot Titan DX Multiband antenna on top. He said the installer brought it over on a large trailer in sections, so he guessed they could take it down and re-assemble it in Allakaket. Besides, it would take a couple of months to build a new house in Allakaket, and sell theirs. Ron said that BA still had the plans for their house if they wanted something similar. Ralph shook Doc's hand and said "Doc, you've got a deal, call Bill, and make it happen. As soon as we get back from the lodge, I'm quitting, and we can work on building a nice house here, and selling the other one." Ralph hugged Sam, and told her that they would be spending a whole lot more time together. She grinned and said "Do you think you can handle it, Band-aid Boy?"

Later, Doc gave them the grand tour, and Ralph made a very critical suggestion.

"Doc, I had an idea. Since we're limited by how many caribou we can safely harvest here each year and keep a viable population, and there is really no hunting involved, the herd is either there or they aren't, you should market this lodge as an upscale "exclusive" lodge to Doctors and professionals who don't have the time to spend weeks tracking down a caribou, but still want the hunting experience, and would like to spend a few days on the lake fishing. Ron might even consider upgrading one of their SuperGoose to a VIP plane, and flying them direct from Anchorage to the lodge and back."

Ron overheard the last part, and commented it would be easy to switch the el-cheapo FAA regular seats for VIP seats, and as far as direct flights go, if they could put in a small fuel depot, which they were thinking about anyway, they could do several round-trip flights per week direct from Anchorage to Doc's Lodge. He asked Doc if that was something that doctors and others would pay extra for.

Doc scratched his chin, and said "You guys might have something there!" Ron grabbed his Cell phone, and called BA, who said he was already working on it, and if they put in a 5,000 gallon tank, they could make 2 trips per week direct from Anchorage, and never have to stop in Allakaket to refuel, which would save over 2 hours of round-trip airtime. He said that while they were at it, they'd install 2,000 gallons of Avgas, since the bush planes used it, as well as the ATV's, and snowmobiles they had on the property. The Super Stallion wasn't busy, and the pilot said something like that would be relatively easy for them to do. Ron gave Doc the good news. He said they should get hold of several hunting magazines that cater to up-scale hunters, and place advertisements. They should also see about getting someone from the magazine to review the lodge. Ron was taking notes like crazy. He and BA would need to get on this ASAP since hunting season was less than 6 months away.

Chapter 54 - The Great Move

After they spent a week at the lodge, Ralph got serious about planning the move. Bill made an offer for Ralph and the seller accepted the \$50K offer. Ralph guessed that the owners were getting a divorce, and the husband was forced to sell, so he sold the place for exactly what he owed on the property, plus \$100. Her lawyer pissed and moaned to the Judge, who rightly decided that since the husband was the sole owner of the property, it was up to him to sell it for what he thought it was worth, and since the bank loaned him \$50K based on the value of the property, then it must be worth about \$50K, and told the attorney to forget it. Ralph, Sam, Nancy, and Ron looked over their house then the plans, and made some minor changes. Since they only had 2 sons, 4 bedrooms instead of 6 would be plenty, and they could use the 4th bedroom for a study/office/computer/radio room. That would make the living room and the bathrooms bigger, especially the master bathroom. They were still going with the full basement, since Ralph wanted an underground room as a safe room. Ron offered to fly all their stuff from Anchorage for the fuel costs only. Ralph said they would like to keep both their vehicles, so they checked into transporting them, and Bear suggested they borrow a vehicle platform from Elmendorf, since they had dozens of them, and almost never used them. Gene and Bear worked out the details to get their vehicles on base at Elmendorf, and anchored securely to the vehicle platform, then flown to Allakaket. Since the Super Stallion had to fly anyway, they decided to load it full of household goods at the same time to save trips.

Ralph rented the largest U-haul trailer that would just fit inside the Super Stallion, and once they boxed stuff up, Ralph loaded the U-haul trailer, and pulled it with the Suburban to Elmendorf. While they were doing all this, Nancy volunteered to babysit Bert and Larry, since they were now weaned, and she'd forgotten all the joys of having 2 boys in diapers! The hospital reluctantly accepted Ralph's resignation, and he received over a month's salary in unpaid vacation, sick leave, and severance equivalent to his profit sharing dividend check for that year, since the disbursement hadn't been made to the 401K yet, and they couldn't legally put money in his 401K unless he was an employee. Doctor Nelson was promoted to the new Chief Resident for Emergency Services, and when he saw Ralph's house, he asked what they wanted for it. Ralph knew what he had paid for it, and asked \$50K extra. Dan agreed in a heartbeat, then asked him if he could include the radio gear, he'd pay him what he paid for the 2 radios and the tower. Ralph dug out his receipts, and added them to the figure, and the total was \$450,000.00 approximately. Dan said he had to sell his place, so he'd like to make a contingent offer of \$450 Thousand for his place, including the tower, and the 2 radios connected to it. Ralph was thanking God, because they wouldn't have to spend any cash if they could sell this place for that much, because the contractor told him they could build his place as a 4-bedroom house using logs on the property for a little over \$350 thousand. It would take Ralph 3 months to build his new house, so he asked Dan if they could close escrow in 60 days, since it would take 2 more months to finish building their house. Dan agreed, and they shook hands.

Dan told Ralph he was glad he was moving here, because they were only a mile away from his new church. When he came home the evening after Sam's surgery, his wife told him she found a new church and wanted to try it out. After he told her what had happened to him, she hugged him, and they prayed together. The next Sunday, they went to the new church, and a month later, gave their lives to Christ. Ralph said "I knew there was a reason for all this. If Sam wouldn't have been in the hospital, I would never have had a chance to talk to you."

"Ralph, I've learned there is a reason for everything. You two gave up your chance to have any more kids, but in return, you saved my wife and I, and our two kids for eternity, I'd call that a pretty fair trade!"

Dan gave Ralph a Guy hug, then they both dried their eyes. Just then Sam came in the room and Dan relayed the story. When Sam told Dan her story, he was moved to tears, and wound up in a group hug as they prayed together. Finally, Dan said he had to get home and give his wife Jean the good news. They lived in a small house in a not-to-nice neighborhood, and this place was perfect. Ralph showed him all the features, including the "Bomb shelter" as he called it. Realizing they were within 20 miles of Elmendorf, which would be a major target in the event of a nuclear war, Dan was glad that Ralph had built the place to survive a nuclear bomb hitting Elmendorf. The upper floor might be destroyed in the blast, but the basement would take anything but a direct hit. When Ralph called Ron and told him they found a buyer for their house, Ron suggested that if they needed a place to stay, they had Anne's old room that was vacant, and the family could be together while they waited for the house to be built. He asked Sam, who agreed in a heartbeat - she was missing her little boys terribly. They needed another week to finish packing, so they waited until they were all packed, and move everything out at once, and drive to Elmendorf.

Dan's house had sold, so Ralph and Dan talked, and agreed to forego the rest of the Escrow, and Dan would be over there with a Cashier's check for \$450 thousand in an hour, and Ralph would hand them the keys so they could move in. Dan and Jean drove up in a Ford F-350 Diesel truck with their 2 sons in back, and a bunch of boxes in the bed of the truck. Dan handed Ralph a cashier's check for \$450,000, and Ralph handed them the keys. They toured the house together quickly, then they had a group hug and prayed, then Ralph and Sam had to go to Elmendorf, since the Super Stallion was waiting for them. The platform they had was big enough for both vehicles, and the crew chief was experienced, and adjusted everything so the platform was balanced, and the vehicles secured firmly. A tow vehicle pushed the u-haul van into the cargo bay, and it barely fit. That left 2 seats up front for Ralph and Sam. The crew chief made sure everyone was buckled in, and tapped the pilot on the shoulder. The turbines spooled up, and the pilot carefully lifted off. He added power as the vehicles on the sling load came off the ground, then he transitioned to forward flight, dipping the nose and adding more power. The crew chief looked below and behind the chopper, and the vehicles were flying on the platform just fine. He leaned over to Ralph, and gave him a thumbs-up to let him know that everything was OK. The lightly loaded helicopter was able to maintain a 140-knot airspeed even with the 2 vehicles on a sling load. 3 hours later, they landed in Allakaket, and they disconnected the sling load,

then landed a safe distance away. Once the crew chief had released the tie-downs, they drove the vehicles off the platform, and connected the Suburban to the U-haul, and slowly pulled it out of the cabin of the CH-53E Super Stallion. They drove off to Ron and Nancy's place while the helicopter refueled, and picked up the platform to return it to Elmendorf.

Ralph and Sam showed up at Ron and Nancy's place, and Sam was grateful that Nancy had everything set up for them, then went to hold her sons. It would be crowded, but it was only for 2 weeks. Ralph parked the U-haul next to the garage, and chained it down to an anchor someone had thoughtfully provided in case someone wanted to park a trailer there. Sam spent the rest of the day spending time with her babies, and Ron suggested they take off to the shooting range to give the girls some time together. Ron's kids wanted to come, of course, so they all piled into Ron's truck. When they got out at the range, Ralph was impressed to say the least. When they got inside, Ron handed eye and ear protection out to everyone. Ralph noticed the headsets said Wolf Ears, and the eye protection was a clear version of the Gargoyle line of glasses. Ralph asked Ron "You guys go first class here?"

"No point in going Second Class when money is no object. The company is worth almost \$100 million, we're clearing over a million per year after taxes and expenses, including my salary, BA's and Bear's. We write off all expenses for the shooting range by calling it an employee benefit. Since almost everyone in town works for Allakaket Airlines in one capacity or another, the range is free for all townspeople. We have shooting leagues running all week, for everyone from the youngest kids at around 7, to a senior league. My kids are usually around the top 1 or 2 competitors on the Junior Small Caliber Rifle shooting league in their age groups. I'm usually the top shooter in the Male Open Pistol League, and Nancy is the top Female shooter in the Women's Open Pistol League, although Sally, BA's wife is giving her fits lately since she hasn't been able to practice as much since she's been babysitting. Next door we have a community pool that is heated by the left-over heat from a 40MW geothermal power plant, and behind that is a huge greenhouse and Tilapia farm that produces fresh vegetables and fish 12 months a year."

"Holy Cow, you guys have a set-up here! I should have moved here sooner!"

"Let's go use the range; I can see that some lanes just opened up. You do have your pistol on you?"

"Just like the American Express Card - never leave home without it!"

Ron picked up 4 50-round boxes of 230gr FMJ practice ammo, and a roll of B-27 targets, and walked to the range. Ralph noticed every time someone shot close by, the headset shut down for a fraction of a second.

"What's the deal with these headsets?"

"You'll get used to them, they're electronic noise suppression headsets, they let normal sounds through, but suppress the heck out of gunfire or any other sudden loud noises. You can hear and talk normally with them on, but I wouldn't rely on them if you're shooting my .44 Magnum in here since they only suppress 29 dB."

"You shoot that hand cannon in here?"

"Got to stay in practice. Just last month a guide shot a bear that was charging from about 15 yards away, and before we opened the range to guides and pilots to shoot their .44 Magnums, they had no place to practice. Oh, the guide drilled the bear right through the heart with his first shot, and the bear died 5 yards from him."

"I see if we stay here, I'm going to need to up-gun slightly."

"The .45 is more than enough in town, it's when you stay at our lodge you might want a .44 Magnum. We usually have to shoot 1 or 2 bears each year that don't take the hint the first time. Also, don't shoot any wolves you see around our place. They're habituated to humans, and are no threat to us if we leave them alone. Ok, here we are. I'll take this lane and you can take that one. Here's a bag to hold your carry rounds." Ron handed Ralph a plastic bag, and Ralph dumped his magazine into it, then reloaded with practice ammo. Ron suggested reloading all their mags, so they could do some "real life" practice with a club timer including reloads. Ralph was looking forward to this. He knew Ron was fast, but he had been practicing. Ron suggested they each fire a couple of mags to warm up, then they'd hold the timer for each other. Since Ralph only had 3 mags, they'd limit the contest to a 3-mag contest. All rounds at 15-yards had to be 10-ring or better, and the contest would be decided on time. Once Ralph was loaded, he waited for Ron, then gave him the "go ahead" gesture. Ron started from low ready, and brought the gun up, and fired a quick 3-round burst, brought the gun down to low ready, and repeated it 5 times, then touched the lever, and the target came in all by itself. Ralph was impressed! 10 rounds were in the Kill zone of the chest, and 5 were in the kill zone of the head. Seems somebody had been practicing!

Ralph went next, and he pulled his P-14 Limited out of his holster slowly, brought it to low ready, and repeated Ron's "Failure to Stop" drill. Ron thought that Ralph had been practicing, because all 15 rounds were right where they belonged, and Ron thought that Ralph might be shooting a tad faster than him. They reloaded, and topped off their mags after putting a round in the chamber. Ron asked Ralph "You ready?"

By now a crowd had gathered, and the range master offered to run the timer, since they were both right handed, he would stand off to the left. He explained the rules to both participants, and told Ron he had to go first. The crowd backed up slightly to give them room, and to maneuver so they could see without getting hit by flying brass. Ralph noticed that Ron was using single-mag carriers instead of a double-mag carrier, and thought that strange. Ron told the range master he was good to go, checked that the area was clear, and raised his hands to the

surrender position. The range master pushed the Go button, and as soon as Ron heard the tone, he swung into action, and a fraction of a second later, the gun was up, and his finger was on the trigger as soon as the sights stopped right below the X-ring. Ron started shooting, and after 15 rounds, the gun locked open, so he did a combat reload, shot 14 more, and did another combat reload. Ralph could see that Ron wasn't missing, and was firing almost as fast as the gun could operate. Ron shot the second mag dry, and did a second combat reload, and kept firing, only losing a little over a second. When it was over, the crowd was standing there in awe. All 43 rounds were in the 10 ring, and when the range master checked the time, he had to check again. Including his draw and 2 reloads, Ron had fired 43 rounds at 15 yards in 31.3 seconds.

Ron smiled at Ralph, but he didn't respond. Ralph walked up to the shooting line with his Game Face on. He didn't look around, all he did was put his hands in the surrender position after running a target out to the 15-yard line. As soon as the buzzer went off, Ralph drew and fired in one motion, and kept firing until he had fired 15 rounds. His gun sounded like a subgun on full-auto he was shooting so fast, Ron was worried because he could see Ralph was in the Zone, and wasn't missing either. Ralph did his first combat reload faster than Ron, and kept shooting at a frenetic pace. He bobbed his second reload when his magazine didn't come smoothly out of the carrier, and it cost him a second. Finally he got the gun reloaded, and emptied the 15 rounds as fast as he could, and keep them in the 10-ring. When his gun locked open, he retrieved his target, and while his group was larger than Ron's, all rounds were in the 10-ring like the Range Master had said. His time, on the other hand, was 32.3 seconds. Ron knew that Ralph would have beaten him by over a second if he hadn't bobbed that second reload, and walked over to Ralph and shook his hand, and told him he would have won if he had used single-mag carriers. Ralph gave him a funny look, so Ron explained it to him like the Gunnery did. When he heard that Ron routinely carried 5 loaded mags, Ralph wondered why in the world someone needed 5 loaded mags, and asked Ron, who told him what Bear had told him regarding an empty gun being an expensive club. Ralph knew better to challenge Ron to shooting rifles, Ron would clean his clock. What he did do was to ask him if they could go to Bear's range some time soon so Ron could work on his long-distance shooting skills, since he couldn't hit anything much past 300 yards with their Bushmaster HBAR Match AR-15's and a 3-9X40 Simmons scope. Ron told him that 300 yards was about the limit for an AR-15, he had a couple of M-1a target rifles he could try at 600 yards since Bear extended the range to 1,000 yards.

When they were finished, they retrieved Ron's kids. Jake was looking at the two of them with his mouth open until Ron suggested he close it before a fly decided to land on his tongue. Finally he said "I heard you two went at it for speed at 15 yards, and you both emptied 3 mags into the 10-ring in around 30 seconds?"

Ron said "So?"

Jake showed his talent for math. "43 rounds in 30 seconds equals 1.43 rounds per second, not including reloads or your draw - did either of you check the cleaners to see when your capes

were going to be done?"

Ralph laughed out loud and gave Jake an Indian Rub, just like an older brother would. "Your father and I have been practicing. Ever since Sam and my wedding, I wanted to shoot like your dad. Did he ever tell you what he did? Steve Stone broke out of prison after murdering Sam's mom, and tracked us down. He burst into the chapel where we were getting married with an M - 4 Carbine set to full auto, intending to kill everyone there. Ron shoved me out of the way, drew his P-14 out of his concealed holster, and shot him twice in the chest, then your mom pulled her gun and shot him in the forehead. Good thing too, because automatic weapons have a funny habit of going off in dead man's hands. When she shot him, she made sure that he couldn't shoot as he was dying. Either one of Ron's rounds would have killed him a few seconds later."

"That's why I'm always practicing a Failure to stop drill - two to the chest, and 1 to the head. Just in case someone tries to hurt us, and is wearing a vest."

"Ron, you're about the fastest pistol shooter I've seen in a long time."

"Ralph, you're even faster than me, if you hadn't blown that second reload you would have beaten me by a second, your gun sounded like a subgun on full-auto. How did you do that?"

"A gunsmith that George knows did a couple of things to it to further slick up the action. The trigger is set right about 2 pounds, and I almost always naturally double-tap. My fastest run at 15-yards from low ready for a 15-round magazine is around 5 seconds."

"No way, this I gotta see!"

"Not today Master Po, Grasshopper is tired!"

"How about if we go to Bear's range tomorrow, and I bring the M-25's?"

"What pray tell is a M - 25?"

"You know who Carlos Hathcock is, right? Springfield Armory took a Match Grade M-1a and pulled out all the stops. It comes with a Krieger Stainless Steel Heavy Match Barrel with a 1:10 twist and a custom low-profile muzzle brake. It's based on the Super Match stock, and comes with a killer 6-20X50 Mil Dot BDC Scope with an illuminated reticle. It's a tack driver for a .308 semi-auto. One slight problem is they cost almost 6 grand each including the scope!"

"Ron, if you've got the time, I'd love to shoot that rifle. I've always wanted a rifle that I could shoot farther than I could see!"

Jake said "I've been shooting 2-3 inch groups with mine at 600 yards!"

Now it was Ralph's turn to stand there open-mouthed. He thought Ron was the only Sniper in the family!

"Ralph, Josh, Sarah, and David are shooting 3-inch groups at 300 yards with their scoped AR-15's just like yours."

Suddenly Ralph was glad he was such a good pistol shot, Ron's 13-year old son David shot groups half the size of his at 300 yards!

When they got home, Nancy already had dinner ready. It was crowded at the table, but not overly so. After dinner, Ralph asked Sam if it were OK for him to go shooting at Bear's place tomorrow. Ron was going to let him use the M - 25, and teach him how to shoot long distance. Sam told Ralph that Nancy had volunteered to teach her how to fly, and if he wanted Ron could teach him. If they wanted to be independent around here, flying was like driving elsewhere, you couldn't get around without flying. Ralph was stunned. He checked into flying lessons when he wanted to go to Louisiana, but it cost thousands of dollars he didn't have, now Ron and Nancy were offering to teach them for free. Ron dropped another bombshell on them, Northrop Grumman called the other day, and they owed Allakaket Airlines another \$600 Thousand in referral fees, and if the USCG bought every SuperGoose they had contracted for, they'd owe them another million or so next year. They offered Ron the choice of the cash or another SuperGoose. If Ralph and Sam could get their Private licenses, he'd give them a SuperGoose, so they could fly anywhere in Alaska they wanted to. Since they were doctors as well, they could work for the State part time as Flying Doctors or Paramedics.

"Let me get this straight - you're giving us a half-million dollar plane, and flying lessons?"

"Not exactly, the plane will belong to Allakaket Airlines, we'll fuel and maintain it, and we'll lease the aircraft to you for \$1 per year."

"Cool - where do we sign up?"

Nancy quipped "I wonder if Anne's Babysitting Service is still in business?"

Everyone but Ralph and Sam cracked up at the old joke, so Ron explained. Ralph asked Sam if they wanted to leave Bert and Larry with Anne and Gene, if she wanted to go shooting tomorrow. She said yes in a heartbeat, so Ron called his Mother, and as usual, she answered the phone "Anne's Babysitting Service"

Of course she said yes, so the next day they would drop the kids off at Anne and Gene's house before they took off.

Chapter 55 - Ma Bell

The next morning, they got everyone loaded into 2 vehicles, and drove to Anne's place. Her and Gene took Bert and Larry, and told Sam not to worry, she's had a lot of experience babysitting, and she hardly dozed off at all anymore since they changed her meds. Sam realized Anne was kidding her, and gave her a hug and said "thanks" then walked back to the Suburban. When they got to the SuperGoose, Ron had a surprise for them, he asked Ralph to get in the copilot's seat, because if he wanted to learn to fly, he needed to start learning now, and he couldn't learn anything sitting in the passenger compartment. Ralph didn't have to be asked twice, and practically flew through the cockpit door. Ron showed him how to adjust the seat, attach the seatbelts, and get plugged into the intercom. Once he had his headset on, Ron told him not to worry, he had the intercom configured so Ron had control of the radio, and the only person who could hear him was Ron. Ron talked him through the pre-flight, explaining everything while he did it, and finally he called the tower for clearance. "SuperGoose 1 en route to Doc's Lodge, requesting take-off and flight clearance."

"Roger SuperGoose 1, you are clear. Have a nice flight."

"Ralph, normally you call in your tail number, but since this is the first SuperGoose produced, the Tail Number is SuperGoose 1, so I can use it as a call sign as well. Your tail number will probably be something like SG135AA, every transmission to the tower should start with your tail number, and if you're in a Terminal Control Area without a radar transponder, your altitude. I've got a huge pile of books for you two to read, so after you're done studying, this will make more sense. Ok, we're taxiing to the downwind end of the lake. You always want to take off into the wind, to increase your airspeed faster than your ground speed. With this big twin-engine turboprop, taking off at Allakaket is a walk in the park. When we land at Allakaket, if you like thrill rides; you're in for a treat. I crank the flaps all the way out, and slow to just above stall speed, and float down to the lake as if we have a parachute. The SuperGoose starts flying at 80 knots of airspeed, so to take off, we turn into the wind, adjust the flaps to 10% to increase our lift, and I've already got the trim tabs adjusted so if I take my hands off the controls, the plane should fly straight and level. Since we have a 200 foot obstruction within a mile of the lake, we have to take off more aggressively than at Anchorage, so I'm going to shove the throttles to full, and as soon as the airspeed indicator reads 80 knots, I'm going to pull back on the yoke until the artificial horizon indicator says I have a 20 degree nose-up attitude. I'll hold that until I'm 500 ft Above Ground Level, or in this case 850 feet Mean Sea Level Then I'll reduce my rate of climb to a cruise climb rate and a 10 degree up angle until we're at 2,000 ft MSL, and I'll hold that altitude until it's time to land." Later, just before he started landing at Help Me Jack Lake, Ron remembered they were going straight to Bear's place, and re-programmed the nav computer. He told Ralph what had happened.

Ralph asked him if it were old age, lack of sleep, or a "blonde moment"?

Since Ron was a blonde, or at least that's what his pilot's license said, he said "Option 3 is the most likely, although I have been getting more forgetful lately!"

Since they didn't start their descent to land at HelpmeJack Lake, Ron made a slight turn north as indicated by the Nav system, and 30 minutes later, they were starting their descent into Bear's lake. Ralph was watching Ron like a hawk, and Ron explained everything he was doing, and why. 10 minutes later, he had lined up for approach, and slowed to landing speed, and touched down with just a little splash. They taxied up Bear's ramp, and stopped in their parking space. Ron shut the turboprops down, and when the props stopped spinning, he unlocked the doors. Jake got up and opened the air stairs, and everyone carried their cased rifles, shooting pads, and targets up to the range. Josh, Sarah, and David set up on the 300 yard line, and as soon as everyone was set up, and had targets up, Bear raised the red flag, indicating a hot range, and the 3 Amigos started shooting. Jake went off to the 600-yard range by himself, and Ron took Ralph and Sam to the far end of the 300 yard range, and set them up with the AR-15 first since the little poodle shooter was easier for a novice to shoot, and he wanted to watch them shoot first.

Ralph and Sam extended the bipods on their rifles, and went prone without any special care, and started shooting. They were doing OK if you called a 6" group at 300 yards OK. Once they had shot their first mags, Ron stopped them, and taught them how to get down into a correct Military Prone position, and had them put the bipods up on their rifles. Next he took their ammo away, and told them they were to do 20 dry fires, paying attention to where the scope was pointing as they felt the trigger break, and handed them a note pad with a large Bulls-eye stamped on it to write down where the crosshairs were when the trigger broke. It took them almost an hour to shoot 20 times, mark where the crosshairs were, pull back on the charging handle, and pull the trigger again. When they finished, Ron handed them a loaded magazine, and told them to do the same thing. Ralph was amazed at how much smaller his groups were. He went from 6 inches to a little over 3 inches based on looking through the scope. He shot a couple more mags until his groups were well-centered and averaged no bigger than 3 inches.

Ron moved him to the 600 yard line and switched him to the M -25. Ron had him go through the same procedure again, dry firing 20 times before he fired a single round. His first group was around 6 inches, not bad, but not as good as that rifle could do at that range. After another 20 rounds, Ron allowed Ralph to use the bipod, since he was getting tired. Meanwhile, Sam's groups were around 3 inches at 300 yards, and she asked Jake to show her how to shoot his gun. Ron was impressed that Jake said yes, and soon Sam was going through the same drill as Ralph, and finally started shooting live rounds. Over the afternoon, her groups shrank from 8 inches to around 6 inches. When they finished, they both had grins on their faces that would make Jimmy Carter proud. Ron reminded them that they had over \$15 million in the bank, and buying 2 of these rifles would only set them back 12 grand. When Ron told Ralph that he had their General Store set aside 2 of them for Ralph and Sam, he wanted to leave right now and get them. Ron said "Patience Grasshopper, your lessons aren't complete." They spent the rest of the afternoon shooting, with Ron and Jake switching back and forth.

Finally Jake suggested that Josh, Sarah, and Dave get to try the M-25s out, since Sam and Ralph were getting tired. Since there were only 2 rifles, they took turns, with Jake teaching his younger sister, who wasn't as big of a brat as she was a couple of years ago, and he actually got along with her. The fact that he had a crush on one of her 16 year-old friends had absolutely nothing to do with it. Sarah took to the bigger rifle like a duck to water. She liked the fact that with the higher power magnification, she could see her bullet holes, which allowed her to shoot smaller groups. Her first group was 5 inches, and by the end of the day, she was down around 4 inches, and all of the bullets were inside the 10-ring at 600 yards. Ron walked away from the shooting line for a minute, and grabbed his cell phone. His store manager was a smart lady, and made a large purchase of the M-25s when she heard that Ralph and Sam were moving to Allakaket. She had 6 complete setups in stock, and 10 cases of Match Ammo from the same lot of Lake City ammo. Ron asked Nancy if she wanted to try, and she said yes. By the time they shot up all their ammo, Ron was going to have to buy 4 more M-25's and Ralph was going to buy 2 for Sam and himself. They loaded everything back into the SuperGoose and flew back to Allakaket, then drove to the General Store. Buying the rifles was as easy as presenting their federal CCW's, and signing the forms. Ron was glad to see that the store manager put the rifles in heavily padded Pelican cases, and included 6 20-round mags each. They drove back to the house and ate dinner. Ralph asked Ron if they could go to Bear's range tomorrow and shoot their new rifles. The chorus of "please" from his kids told Ron they were going to Bear's again tomorrow.

The next morning they loaded the truck and the Suburban, and left Bert and Larry with Anne again, and drove to the airport. The kids quickly loaded the SuperGoose, and Ron asked Ralph if he wanted to fly up front again, and Ralph said "Make sure we're going to Bear's place this time before we take off." Ron started laughing, and said he'd make sure to land at the right lake. Ralph watched Ron like a hawk. When Ron asked permission to take off and fly to Bear's place this time, even the tower got into the act "Roger SuperGoose 1, are you sure you don't want to go to HelpmeJack Lake?"

"Real Funny tower, don't quit your day job. Are we cleared to take off or what?"

"Roger SuperGoose, you're clear to take off, just make sure you land at the right lake."

Ralph said over the intercom "Everyone's a Comedian!" and prepared for takeoff.

A little over an hour later, they landed at Bear's lake, and Bear was waiting for them this time with his ATV and the trailer, so they piled all the cases and stuff on the trailer, and Bear strapped them to the trailer, and drove to the range while they walked behind. Ron had put everyone's name on their case with a stencil and spray can of paint. It wasn't the prettiest job, but at least they knew whose rifle was whose, because they each shot a different zero. Bear had set 8 lanes up for 600 yard shooting, instead of the usual 4, so there was no crowding. The rest of the day, the dominant sound was the boom and crack of high-powered rifle fire. Bear watched Ron and Jake on his spotting scope. At 600 yards, Jake could just about keep up with

his dad, maybe he should expand the range so they had more thousand yard lanes. They could use the wood after all. After spending an hour or so getting their zero dialed in on their scopes, Ralph and Sam's groups started shrinking, and soon Sarah, Ralph, Josh, and Sam were neck-and-neck for the smallest group of the day out of the four of them. Ron and Jake were shooting sub-3 inch groups all day, with an almost boring regularity.

Jake was getting better at doping the wind, and was getting really good at using the mirage to estimate wind speed and direction. He wished they could set up a pop-up range so he could use the mil-dot range-finding system for unknown distance shooting. He realized his Dad was teaching him to shoot long distance because there were people in the world that wanted what they had, and were willing to lie, cheat and kill to get it. Like Bear said "Long Distance means you never have to say you're sorry!" He'd read on the Internet about the brutality of the Moslem Terrorists, including the Chechen Rebels - he loved how the Liberal Press gave titles like Rebel or Freedom Fighter to terrorists whose causes they supported, but how they called people like Randy Weaver and Timothy McVeigh "terrorists". Some of the internet sites he read were written by people who wanted to restore the Constitution to it's original meaning, and reduce the Federal Government to a manageable size. They called themselves Patriots, but the newspapers called them "Anti-Government Survivalist Nuts". He was amazed that the average American could swallow the BS the papers were printing, then Ron told him about the "Big Lie" tactic, and showed him an internet site that described Adolph Hitler's tactic of telling the same big lie over and over again until the people believed it. He understood why the Patriots on the internet called the average American "sheeple" - they would be lead like lambs to the slaughter. He wanted to make sure that didn't happen to his family. Since he was now 16, Bear had inducted him into the Allakaket Militia, and shown him some things that would prevent those who wished them ill from succeeding. He hoped he never had to use them, and was afraid for his brothers and sisters, because Bear impressed on him that no sane man wants war, because usually the first to die are innocent civilians, and there is almost no way that an army won't take casualties even fighting a defensive action. He wasn't afraid to die, because he knew he was going to Heaven when he died, he just didn't want to go just yet!

Bear watched everyone shooting, and knew if TSHTF, several of them might not make it, and he might have to send them to their deaths to defend everyone else. With the 2 Barretts rifles, he knew that Ron and Jake were his best long-distance shooters, and Ralph and Josh were the best shooters so far with the M-25s, and could act as spotters and back-up shooters to them. He knew Sarah and Sam were just as good shooters as Ralph and Josh, but he couldn't put a man and a woman together on a sniper team, because the man might try to protect the woman, sometimes to the detriment of the mission. When Sarah got older, if Sam could still shoot, he might team them together for a 3rd team if Barretts shipped them another rifle. That was a few years off, so Bear didn't need to worry about that. For now the political situation in the US was fairly stable, but it wouldn't take much to either cause a Police State, or Anarchy.

When they finally got tired of shooting, they packed it all in, and headed home. Sam picked up her boys on the way home, and they all cleaned their rifles in the garage before putting them

back in their cases. The next day, Ralph went to check on their new house, and was amazed that they were almost finished, and there was a huge stack of firewood next to the house, and someone had even split it for them, and put the smaller pieces that would make good kindling in a huge galvanized bucket next to the pile, and covered the entire pile with a tarp. He walked inside, and the first thing he saw was the huge river stone masonry heater stove/fireplace that dominated the great room. The kitchen was fully modern, with a commercial stove and oven combination, and a huge stainless steel hood with a fire suppression system. They bought a huge side-by-side refrigerator, and a 20 cubic foot freezer. Ralph knew they had a lot of shopping to do, and Ron had suggested a furniture store in Fairbanks, which was much closer than Anchorage, and had better prices. Once they were ready to move in, Ron said he'd fly them to Fairbanks to buy new furniture.

Ralph and Sam were both grateful to Ron and Nancy for letting them stay with them, but they were glad when their house was finished. They hitched up the u-haul to the Suburban and drove down the road, and made a left instead of a right, and drove down their driveway. This was the first time Samantha had seen her new house, and it took her breath away. It looked like Ron and Nancy's house, except it didn't have the room addition attached to it that broke up the classic A-frame shape. She'd seen the fake log cabins that were just faced with split logs, then she realized the logs in her house were full-size logs cut from their property, and over a foot thick. She knew it would be warm and cozy, and Ralph knew it would stop anything short of a .50 BMG round or a RPG. They used the heavy armor plate shutters and the heavy armored door in this house too. When Sam opened the door, she realized that it looked like a wood door, but it was heavier than she was which meant that it had 2 3/8-inch armor plate steel plates inside it sandwiched between plywood and particle board. The locking hardware on the inside looked like it was meant for a bank vault, and the door frame was as heavy as the door. The door frame was welded steel 6 inches thick, and lag bolted into the logs with recessed head foot-long lag bolts. Anyone trying to break down that door could huff and puff all they wanted to. With the shutters closed and locked, it would take an RPG to get at them, then they had the full basement/ emergency shelter with a blast-resistant door that would take almost a pound of C-4 to open once the locks were engaged. They copied Ron's design exactly, and used air-powered hydraulic rams to swing the door closed under tremendous air pressure from a pressurized tank that could close the 2-ton door in less than a second if he hit the panic button. The beauty of the system was if he needed to get the door open, even if the upper floor was destroyed, by flipping a switch the rams would depressurize slowly, and the door would lower by gravity alone.

Ron, Nancy, and their kids helped them move everything in, then the next day Ron flew Ralph and Sam to Fairbanks while Nancy watched the kids. He called ahead, and had all the passenger seats removed, and the jump seat installed in the cockpit door since it was a short flight, and they wanted to maximize cargo space. Sam wisely volunteered to ride in the jump seat on the way down so she could catch a nap in the much more comfortable co-pilots' seat on the way back. Ron hailed a cab when they got to Fairbanks, and they went to the same store. Ron spotted the store manager, and introduced Ralph and Sam as a couple of friends of his that

needed to buy a houseful of furniture and stuff. While they shopped, Ron parked himself in a chair and read a paperback he was trying to finish. They showed up 2 hours later, and said that the manager had volunteered to deliver their furniture to the airport and load the aircraft for free. Sam commented that the service was exceptional there, and Ron quipped that the last time there, they had the personal attention of the manager and a stock boy to fetch stuff, and maybe even shine their shoes. Ralph started laughing, and said "Must be nice to be the king, or at least royalty!"

"Between the 4 of us, we've dropped almost \$40 thousand dollars here in 2 trips, that kind of cash gets their attention. Besides, I think someone tipped them off when we showed up because they were fawning all over us."

Ron hailed another cab, and beat the delivery truck to the plane by 15 minutes. Ron lowered the ramp, and it made loading much easier. An hour later, the passenger compartment was as full as it was going to get, and they just barely got all the stuff loaded. Ron was glad he had the 6-foot longer SuperGoose instead of the TurboGoose, because it would never have fit. That jarred Ron's memory, and made a note to himself to deliver the box of study materials to Ralph and Sam's place that afternoon. Once they were airborne, Ron called Allakaket and had 2 baggage handlers available to unload the plane, and transfer the stuff to Ralph and Sam's place.. He landed as gently as he could at Allakaket, and taxied to the hangar, where the 2 baggage handlers met them to unload the plane and transfer it first to Ron's truck, then to put it in their new house. They finished just before dinner, and Ron asked if they wanted to come over for dinner. Sam said that she had some Cajun Gumbo defrosting on the counter for dinner, but thanks anyway. Sam drove over in the Suburban to pick up Bert and Larry, and Nancy had another present ready for her. Jake carried several heavy boxes out to the Suburban, and put them inside the tailgate while Nancy helped Sam belt the boys into their car seats. Nancy said the boxes were all the manuals they had to know before they could touch an aircraft. She said they had to hurry up, because the SuperGoose would be ready in 3-4 months. Ron had ordered the new SuperGoose with the VIP package, and deleted everything except the VIP leather passenger seats, the upgraded carpet, and the hidden recessed lighting, which wouldn't get in the way of cargo. The seats were still removable for a Medevac or Cargo mission. He was going to lease SuperGoose #1 to Ralph and Sam, and fly the new VIP SuperGoose for 2 flights per week from Anchorage to Doc's Lodge.

Their advertising campaign, and word of mouth had booked the lodge full for the season. It seemed their idea of a hunting/fishing package without all the work appealed to dozens of doctors, lawyers and other professionals who had more money than time. Doc suggested an upscale menu, but heavy on meats and potatoes. They did provide a healthier fare on request, but it was basically very fancy "Hunting Lodge" food, heavy on game products. Their commercial kitchen could can and process their kills into canned meat and sausage in time for them to carry the meat and the skin back home with them in a much more compact package. Since they weren't trophy hunting, the heads weren't mounted, and the brains used to brain tan the hides. Some of the hunters wanted to keep the racks until Ron advised them how huge the racks were,

and what it would cost to ship them back home. During hunting season, Jake and Josh volunteered to act as assistant guides, and learn the ropes of guiding from one of the best guides in the area. Since they were already living in their lodge right next door, it was a short walk to Doc's Lodge. Even Sarah and David got into the act, and went out with the fishing parties. Starsky and Hutch were now full-grown, and went everywhere with Jake and Josh. Each hunting season, Jake and Josh each took a large caribou, and the guide was impressed with their shooting skills, and made them always take the animals on the far side of the clearing, a 400-yard shot, and they both always hit the animal in the neck/shoulder region, killing the animals practically instantly. Jake was very fast with his Ulu, and could skin just as fast as the guide could. Josh and Jake helped the guests skin and brain tan their kills, and properly pack the meat for the return trip. Sarah and David made themselves useful on the fishing trips, sometimes driving the boat, but usually working as the mate, baiting hooks, gaffing fish, and cleaning them. Ron knew it was good experience for his kids, because even if they were so wealthy that they didn't have to work, Ron wanted them to develop a good work ethic, and realize the value of a dollar, so when they retired, the business would be in good hands.

Ralph and Sam spent the next couple of months studying to get their Student Pilot's permit, and 3 months later, they both started flying lessons. Ralph flew right seat when Ron flew to Anchorage twice a week, and they spent another day in flying lessons. Ralph's first take-off at Allakaket was exhilarating, and when he came back and landed, he was hooked. Whenever Ron and Ralph weren't using the SuperGoose, Ralph took care of Bert and Larry while Nancy and Sam flew the same lessons Ralph did. 3 months later, Ron flew Ralph to Anchorage to get his Commercial Pilot's rating, since he needed 2/3 of it anyway to fly the SuperGoose. Dan was surprised, and then stunned to find out Ron was leasing a SuperGoose to Ralph and Sam for a dollar a year. Dan quipped "So where do I sign up for the "Friends of Ron" club?"

Ron laughed, then gave Dan the Reader's Digest version of their story. Since they were both doctors, he suggested they notify the State of Alaska, and get the SG fully equipped. Ron said it already was - he was a State Paramedic. Dan handed Ralph the test, and 3 hours later, Ralph handed it back to him. He scored 85%, which was a passing grade. The nurse checked his pulse, vision, and listened to his heart, and signed off on the medical evaluations. While he didn't have the cadaver-like pulse of Ron, or his Eagle-eye vision, Ralph was in excellent health, and had 20-20 uncorrected vision. Dan handed Ralph a temporary copy of his commercial ticket, and said he'd send the original to Allakaket. Ron told Dan that they now had PO Boxes for all the residences, since they redesigned the Mayor's office, and built a new church for the growing town. Don thought that having 4 multi-millionaires in a small town must be nice, he'd have to consider retiring to Allakaket when he retired. Ralph handled the take-off and landing, and Ron complimented him on the landing, which was as smooth as glass. The next week, Nancy and Sam made a trip to the FAA office in Anchorage, and Sam had her Commercial Ticket as well.

2 weeks later, Grumman called, and said that the SuperGoose was ready. Ron called the airport, and had them make SuperGoose ready for an over-water transit to Vancouver, then called Anne,

and asked her if She and Gene wanted to stay at their place for a couple of days, they were going to pick up the SuperGoose in Vancouver. Ron paid extra to have Grumman fly the plane to Vancouver, so they didn't have to make the really long over-water flight from Seattle to Los Angeles. Ron called Col. Sandberg, and asked him if they could spend the night at their hotel, he wanted to bring 2 very good friends of his with them to pick up a VIP SuperGoose. It turned out Col. Sandberg was now Lt. Gen. Sandberg thanks to the job he did with the SuperGoose, and said that any time they wanted to, to call him and he'd comp as many rooms as he needed for up to a week. Ron thought about that, and asked if he had a multi-room suite for him and his wife, and their kids. General Sandberg said he'd call him right back. 15 minutes later, he informed Ron that the VIP suite was available for the next 2 weeks, It encompassed the entire upper floor of the hotel, had 6 rooms plus a huge common room, and they could comp him the VIP suite for a week if he wanted it. Ron said yes in a heartbeat, thanked the General, who said he'd e-mail the confirmation to him within the hour. He gave Nancy and the kids the good news, then called Ralph and Sam. They were eager to see Vancouver, especially when Ron said it was all free, all they had to do was fly their new SuperGoose home from Vancouver. He was going to loan them SuperGoose #1, and he was picking up a brand-new VIP SuperGoose in Vancouver. After Gen. Sandberg agreed to comp them the VIP suite for the whole week, they decided to make a vacation out of it. Ralph and Sam talked about it, and decided that Bert and Larry were too young to enjoy it, so they called Ron back and asked if Anne's Babysitting Service could take them for a week. Ron called Anne and asked her if she could watch Ralph and Sam's boys instead, they were taking the family to Vancouver for the week courtesy of the RCAF. Gene had picked up the extension, and thought "It's good to be the King!", and Anne said they'd love to take Sam's 2 darling little boys for a week. Ron asked if they'd rather have them at their place, or go to Ron or Ralph's place. Anne said they had plenty of room here, so they should stay at Anne's place for the week. Ron thanked his mom, and called Ralph back. When he received the confirmation e-mail, Ron replied to remind Gen. Sandberg that the 4 of them were all Federal CCW holders, and asked if he could arrange their Canadian CCW's for the week. Gen. Sandberg asked for their names, and said he'd forward the info to the RCMP office in Vancouver.

The next day they got ready to fly to Vancouver, and met at the aircraft. Ralph and Sam had dropped Bert and Larry off at Anne's, and met them at the airport. Nancy wanted to fly right seat with her husband, so Ralph and Sam rode in the back this time with the kids. Once they had their headphones on and the cabin door closed, Nancy said "Guess we have to skip the mile high club this trip?"

"Only if you don't want to shock our friends, and gross out the kids!"

Nancy gave him a kiss, and said she'd take a rain check for tonight in the Hotel instead.

They flew to Vancouver, landed at the RCAF base, and got a ride to the Hotel. They checked in, and 4 bell boys took their luggage up to the VIP suite. On the table was a note from General Sandberg saying they had exclusive use of 2 limousines for the week, and to make sure to write

their room number on the bill. They checked out their rooms, and the level of opulence staggered them. Ron was pretty sure the faucets were gold-plated, the bathrobes, sheets, and pillowcases were silk, and the towels were made out of the finest cotton. The bathrooms were bigger than most people's bedrooms, and the bedrooms were bigger than some people's houses. Everyone had their own rooms, since the suite was a 6-room suite, and they had to use their room key in the elevator just to get the elevator to stop on this floor, which opened to a privacy door and a small alcove. Ron told them that their dinner reservation was for 5:30, and they had 45 minutes to get downstairs in time for their reservation, they should all shower and change now, and they'd meet in the common room in 40 minutes. Ron hoped the building had a huge water heater, with 3 women taking showers at once.

40 minutes later, Ron was amazed at the transformation in his children. Sarah looked like a young lady, for the first time in her life she was wearing a dress with her hair down instead of jeans and a pony tail. She looked exactly like her mother, and he gave her a big hug. "Sarah, you're beautiful, I don't know if I've ever told you that before?"

"Probably not dad, I've been a tomboy 24/7 until now."

Ron decided to rectify that, and suggested she was OK to wear whatever she wanted whenever she wanted, except she still had to wear a 1-piece swimsuit at the pool that her mom would choose for her. Sarah knew her dad was just being protective, so she gave him another hug instead of arguing with him. "Thanks Dad, I love you too!" Jake and Josh showed up a minute later, and they both looked much older in their suit and tie. David even looked older, Nancy came out, and she was still a stunning woman, now he knew where Sarah got her looks. He walked over to her, and gave Nancy a big hug. She noticed the kids too, and said "I know - they're getting older, which means we are too!" Ralph and Sam made their entrance minutes later, and Ron tried hard to keep his mouth closed. If anything, having two kids made Sam even more beautiful. He was glad that Nancy was such a hottie, or he might have been envious. The two couples walked to the elevator while the kids followed along, trying to act as grown-up as possible. When they exited the elevator, they walked to the entrance to Bacchus, the hotel's famous French restaurant.

The Matre de greeted them "Monsieur Williams, Monsieur Lacombe, your table is ready."

Ralph replied in French, which amazed the Matre de, who was a French Canadian transplant from the Toronto. "Est-ce que Monsieur Lacombe, votre Français endroit l'excellent, mais de I can't l'accent, de quelle région de la France sont vous est-il ? »

"I'm un Cajun de Louisiane."

They chatted in French while they were seated, and when Ralph saw the prices on the menu he nearly choked until Ron reminded him the entire bill was comped, including meals, so they were to enjoy themselves. 4 waiters appeared, set wine glasses in front of the adults, and a nice

bottle of wine, which the headwaiter told him was “compliments of the house.” Ron refused to be impressed, because of course the dinner was comped anyway, until Ralph got a look at the bottle, and pointed out to Ron that the bottle of wine was an expensive French import that probably cost several hundred dollars a bottle. That got Ron’s attention! They all ordered the lamb as a main course, and most ordered the mushroom soup. Ron asked if they could split 3 orders of the appetizers so they would have room for the lamb. The headwaiter suggested 3 appetizers, and the cook would make enough of each so they would each get some. Ron thought that was an excellent idea, and asked the waiter to take care of it. 15 minutes later, the appetizers were served, and Ron said grace since the restaurant was basically empty except for them. Nancy thought the food was better than last time, and the soup was excellent. Finally they brought out 6 huge racks of lamb with mint jelly, and Ron was glad they hadn’t ordered full orders of appetizers or they wouldn’t be able to finish it. When they finished, Ron wrote room 1700 on the bill, and the waiter thanked them. They walked back to the elevator, and went up to the rooms. Each room had its own private balcony, where the couples had some private time before going to bed. Each one of the kids’ rooms was equipped with a video game system to keep them entertained.

They met for breakfast next morning, dressed casually for a day on the town. Ron suggested to Ralph they stop at a camera shop first and buy Ralph a new digital camera just like Ron’s, because they were going to Stanley Park, and Ralph would probably want to take a picture of everything there. Sarah was back into jeans and a pony-tail, but Ron knew that the swan would emerge for dinner again that evening. After breakfast, they walked out the front door, which was opened by a doorman in uniform, and two grey limousines awaited them. Ron told them were he wanted to go. Ron’s family piled into 1, and Ralph and Sam took the other one. Minutes later they parked in front of the Ritz Camera Shop that Ron bought his camera years ago. The same guy still owned it, but was looking much older. Ron asked if he had another camera like his in stock, and his eyes brightened when he remembered Ron. He told them he was closing the store and retiring, the city had offered to buy the building for twice what he thought it was worth, but didn’t want any of the inventory, so he was selling all his inventory at rock-bottom prices. He had a Minolta DiMage Z2 for sale for \$350, and if he included the 512MB memory chip, he’d sell it for \$400. Everything else in the store was 10% over cost, since he had to be out within the month. Ron asked his kids if they wanted a camera, and only Sarah wanted one. The owner said he had 4 more Z2’s in stock at that price, and if he took all 4 with 512 chips in them, he’d sell them for \$350 each. Ron said “Sold! Ralph, I’m going to buy all 4 and give you and Sam 1, leaving my wife and kids to fight over 3 cameras.” Since neither Nancy nor the boys seemed to be shutterbugs, he figured there wouldn’t be much fighting. They went through the store, and bought any accessories for the cameras that they thought they would need. The owner said he had 8 sets of 4 NiMh batteries in back on a speed charger, and he’d sell them the batteries and the charger for the cost of the batteries. Ron told him to add it to the list. Including cases, filters, tripods, cable releases, and 2 high-power flash units, the total came up to \$3,000.00 USD. Ron handed the owner his American Express card, who ran it through the machine, and Ron signed the receipt. The owner configured the 4 cameras, loaded the 512MB chips, and handed him 4 spare 16MB chips, and the 4 extra 512MB chips they

bought since the owner said the chip was the first thing to fail on the camera, and with a replacement chip stored in a static-proof case, the camera might outlast them.

Ron handed Ralph one of the cameras in it's case and handed Sam the tripod. Evidently the wives were used to being pack mules. They carried their purchases out to the limousines, and the drivers suggested they drop them off at Stanley Park and return later to pick them up, since limousine parking was almost impossible to find in the park. The driver handed Ron a cell phone with the hotel's number already loaded. He said if they ever needed the limousines to meet them somewhere, just call and they'd be there. The driver assured them their purchases would be safely transported to their room and waiting there. Ron asked if anyone else wanted a camera, because they were going to the hotel. Jake took one just in case, and Sarah had her unit. Nancy said she was already loaded as heavily as she could stand. Josh and David said they didn't want to lug a camera around, so Ron told the drivers to put the other camera and their bags in their room, and they would call them later that afternoon to pick them up. The limos dropped them off right at the main entrance to Stanley Park. Ron restrained himself this time, but Ralph made up for him, shooting a picture of nearly everything in the park. Ron was glad he had the 512MB chip, because Ralph would probably fill up one of the smaller chips the first day of their vacation. They skipped lunch at the Tea House, since they all wanted to enjoy dinner. Finally Ron called the limousines, and they drove right to his location. Ralph was confused, and the driver explained that the cell phones had a GPS chip in them, and could transmit their exact location to someone transmitting the proper code. All their cellular phones had the chip, and the emergency service dispatchers consoles all had a valid code, so if someone called 911, they knew exactly where to send help. The hotel knew about this feature, and installed a dispatch center that could use the feature. Ron was glad he wasn't paranoid, or he'd freak out if he knew that someone could monitor his every move using a cell phone.

They all ate heartily at dinner, and they managed to eat a plate of appetizers each, the soup, and an entire rack of lamb. After dinner, Sam decided she wanted to attack Ralph, and he was glad the walls were thick, or no one else would have gotten any sleep that night either. In deference to Ralph's exhausted condition, they took it easy the next day, and went sightseeing. They spent the rest of the week acting like tourists, then they checked out of the hotel, and had the limousines drive them to the RCAF base. Chief Nichols was now Master Chief Nichols, and had moved to a different base, so they were met at the gate by a new Maintenance Chief, who waved the limos through. They parked next to their old SuperGoose and the new VIP SuperGoose. They marveled at the luxury of the new VIP Goose. The seats were similar to the pilot's and co-pilot's except they were leather and they reclined fully. The entire passenger compartment only held 10 VIP seats with a huge aisle between them, and plenty of room in the back for luggage, etc. Since this was a convertible model, there was no lavatory on board, but the carpet was definitely first class, even if it was removable. Ron and Nancy piled all their stuff into the new SuperGoose while Ralph and Sam loaded their plane. Ron suggested to Ralph that they try to avoid the Mile High club on their first over-water trip. Ron had to explain that one, and Ralph turned 3 shades of red - he didn't even think of that! Besides with the seats installed, it would be cramped and awkward to try. He suggested that Ralph follow them a

couple of miles back, and stay in radio contact if they were separated visually. Ron gave him the coordinates for Allakaket, and the radio frequencies to monitor, then walked back to his plane. Nancy already had the turbines idling, and as soon as he was seated and plugged in, she asked Ron what made Ralph turn beet red. Ron laughed and said that he suggested they skip the mile high club this trip, and that Ralph didn't know what it was, and when he explained it, Ralph turned 3 shades of red. Nancy laughed her head off, and they got ready to fly home.

Ron landed first, and turned around to watch Ralph land. He made a textbook water landing, and taxied up to the hangar following the guidance of a ground crewman waving lighted batons. Ralph climbed wearily into their Suburban and drove to Anne's place to pick up their kids. Sam was glad to see them, and Ralph was just glad to get home and get some sleep for a change. The next day he downloaded the pictures to his computer, and e-mailed some of the best ones to Ron. He made sure not to e-mail a few private pictures they shot in the hotel's bedroom when they were in a silly mood.

Chapter 56 - Honey-do's

The next morning Ralph woke up to find a long list of chores that Samantha had written out for him. She figured that since he wasn't working in the Hospital, she could get some stuff done around the house. Ralph was a smart guy and called Ron, and asked for some help. Ron didn't want to have to cut and split wood, but he'd send Jake and Josh over with the Kubota tractor to make the job easier. Half an hour later, Ralph heard the rumble of a diesel tractor coming up the drive right as he finished his coffee. Jake and Josh were towing a trailer they had built for hauling lumber that was low to the ground, and used the tractor's PTO to power the trailer-mounted winch to pull the logs on board. They also included the gas-powered chain saw, 10 gallons of pre-mixed Avgas and 2-cycle oil, the sledge and wedge for splitting the wood, and Ron's safety gear. Ralph climbed aboard, and they drove out to Ralph's stand of trees. Sam wanted the stand closest to the house cleared to use for a garden, so they not only had to chop and stack the wood, but also pull the stumps. Since Ralph hadn't used a chainsaw before, Jake got volunteered to do it this time, but he wanted Ralph to learn how, so they brought a second set of safety gear for Ralph. Jake told Ralph how things worked, and the basics of tree felling. Jake did the first 6, and then Ralph said he'd like to try it. Jake picked an easy tree that didn't look complicated, and they conferred as to how to drop the tree.

Ralph started the chainsaw on the first pull since the engine was already warmed up, and made his first cut, pulled the blade out, cut the wedge, then stepped around the tree, and made his final cut. He yanked the blade clear, released the chain brake handle which stopped the chain immediately, and he took 6 quick steps back away from the tree like Jake had taught him. The tree fell with a crash right where Jake said it would. Ralph was hooked, and insisted on doing the rest of the trees. Josh and Jake started using hatchets to limb the smaller branches off the trees while Ralph dropped more trees in an area safely away from where they were working. They made sure to keep each other in sight, and by lunchtime, they had all the trees felled and limbed. They attached a choker to the logs and hauled them aboard the trailer with the tractor's PTO winch and secured them to the trailer. Jake drove the tractor back over to the house, and Sam had lunch ready. They ate their sandwiches, and drank the iced tea, then back to work! Ralph set up the sawhorse so he wouldn't have to lift the huge logs to saw them to length. Josh helped split and stack the wood while Jake used the tractor to pull the stumps out. Right as it was getting dark, they called it quits. Jake had all the stumps pulled, and Ralph had most of the wood sawn to length and split, so Jake took the tractor back over to his place for dinner. Ralph offered to pay them, but Jake insisted that their Dad said they weren't to take Ralph's money, that they were just doing what was considered neighborly. Ralph spent the next day cutting and splitting the rest of the wood, then the day after he drove over to Bill's place to borrow the rototiller. He had covered the bare ground with sawdust and wood chips left over from the lumber milling process that built his home, and tilled it into the soil. Samantha would plant a garden starting next year.

While Ralph was busy in the yard, Sam surfed the internet, located the place that Nancy

recommended for the security cameras and the monitor. She ordered enough cameras to cover the areas the kids were in, and to watch the front and back yard. She bought special low-light capable cameras for the front and back yard, which could provide a black and white image at night using starlight if necessary. Ralph had the house wired for motion-detecting lights, even though Ron said that wild animals would be tripping the lights all the time.

Ron quickly re-equipped his VIP SuperGoose with a new SU-16, survival kit, First Aid kit, Paramedic Kit, and oxygen delivery kit. The mechanic spent about a half-hour mounting them to the bulkheads. Ron took the SU-16 to the range to confirm the zero, and was glad that this rifle shot smaller groups than his last SU-16. He got an in-vehicle cross-band repeater installed as well, and a cellular repeater. Ron called Ralph, and reminded him that he needed to get his General License and get the radio and tower up. Ralph said he'd add it to his "honey-do" list. That reminded Ron that his list was getting long, and he had to get back home and whittle it down to size. Ralph reminded Sam that they needed to finish studying for their FCC General license, and he needed to get hold of the radio dealer in Anchorage and see if he could work something out. He called Tom, who said that he figured he'd be calling back since they sold the house with the antenna tower. He said that shipping an antenna and tower to Allakaket was expensive. Ralph floored him when he said he had his commercial pilot's license, and access to a Super Goose, and if it wouldn't fit in there, they could fly it over using a CH-53E Super Stallion that could haul 36,000 pounds on a sling load. Tom said there was no way the tower would fit inside his aircraft. Ralph asked if there was any problem using a tall tree as a tower. Tom said he'd never done it before, but there was no reason why not, they'd just have to build a chain bracket to mount the antenna to the tree. They'd have to top the tree, which meant hiring a logger, because topping a live tree was dangerous.

Ralph said he'd get back to him, but he definitely wanted the Kenwood TS-480SAT, and the Titan antenna. Tom said the tower without shipping or installation was \$2,000 dollars, and he charged \$1500 to install it, and they'd need a crane to lift it up. Ralph asked if they could use a helicopter top pick up the assembled tower and drop it into place. Tom thought that the rotor wash would be bad, but they could wear protective clothing if that was all they had available. Ralph said he'd make some phone calls and get back to him. Ralph called Ron, and asked him what to do. Ron thought the tree would be easier and safer, since he knew a couple of loggers in town who could top the tree fairly easily, and it would have to be easier and safer than flying a 100-foot tower, and setting it up. Ralph asked Ron to check how much they would charge to top a 75-foot tree, and fasten an antenna to it. Ron made a couple of phone calls and a couple of loggers who were between jobs said that they'd do it for \$500. Ron called Ralph, who called Tom, who said he located the appropriate connector, and he thought using a tree was a novel idea, but it would work. Ralph told him to order all the parts, and call him when they were in to arrange everything. Ralph told Tom that the loggers were going to attach the antenna to the tree, and all he had to do was attach the coax cable to the antenna so they could haul it up the tree.

Ralph had a nice lodge pole pine in mind, the top was at least 75 feet up, and it was 100 feet from the house. He ordered enough 10-foot lengths of ABS plastic burial conduit with connectors to do the job with 2 spares, and told the company that he'd need it delivered to the Commercial delivery terminal at Anchorage International. 2 weeks later, Tom called, and the radio was in, and he had the chain brackets, 200 feet of 50 ohm coax just to be on the safe side, the connectors, some wood screw eye hooks for the guy wires, 600 feet of guy wire, and some guy anchors for the ground. Ralph never heard of guying a tree, but he realized that it wouldn't hurt, since the tree was essentially dead once it was topped. Ralph called the loggers, who said they could top the tree one day, and install the antenna the next, since they probably wanted the tree top out of the way. He asked them what they would charge to install a chain bracket to the top of the tree, haul a 40-pound, 40 foot antenna up the tree, and install it on that bracket. Ralph heard their laughter over the phone. "We'll only charge you \$100 to install the antenna, and anything else you need done while we're up there. I'll install a pulley onto the top of the tree after we cut the top off, and we can use that to haul the antenna up. The two of us can muscle it into place on the tree from there. Make sure you ask the guy who's selling you this if it has to be right on top of the tree, or how much of the antenna has to be above the top of the tree."

Ralph called Tom back, who told him the lower 6 feet was designed to mount the antenna, and only the top 30 feet have to be above the tree. Ralph called the loggers back, and gave them the good news. They said they could do that easily. They'd come over tomorrow to top the tree, then they could install the antenna the next day. Ralph called Tom back, and said the loggers were going to top the tree tomorrow, and they would be ready to install the tree in 2 days. Tom asked Ralph if he could meet him in Anchorage at 0800 in 2 days. Ralph said he'd be flying a SuperGoose amphibian, and to ask the Ground Crew supervisor, or the gate guard where to park for the Commercial Delivery Terminal. Ralph went out and started digging a trench from the house to the tree, and was finished shortly after dark. The next day the loggers showed up, scampered up the tree like tree squirrels, and 15 minutes later the top of the tree came crashing to earth. They drove a spike into the top of the tree, and attached a pulley and a 200 ft. piece of rope with a clip on it, and deployed the rope as they came down the tree.

The next morning Ralph flew to Anchorage, picked up Tom and several boxes full of stuff including the antenna, which came in 5 boxes semi-assembled with directions written in Taiwanese according to Tom. Luckily he had assembled so many of them he could do it in his sleep. They landed in Allakaket, and Ralph loaded the Suburban until it was stuffed. Everything just barely fit, and they drove to Ralph's house. Tom needed a couple of hours to assemble the antenna, so he told Ralph to have the lumberjacks ready to go at noon. He called them, and they said they'd be there. At 11:45, the lumberjacks' truck pulled up, and they unloaded their gear and got ready to climb the tree. They said if Ralph and Tom could haul the rope up while they climbed, they could keep it from banging into the tree. The more experienced climber took the lead, and carried a tool belt with the wrenches needed to tighten all the connections on 6-foot leaders connected to his belt to keep Ralph and Tom from getting brained in case he dropped one, and he didn't feel like having to climb the tree more than once today. They put on their safety belts and their climbing spikes and started up.

The lead climber held the tower with one hand, and climbed with the other, and the lower climber stayed on the ground until the lead climber was 30 feet in the air, and climbed up after him holding the lower section. Without the use of both hands, it was a slow climb, but they made it. Since the upper climber made it to where he needed to mount the clamps, he let the lower climber steady the antenna while he attached the chain brackets to the tree. Once they were secured, Ralph and Tom slowly hauled the rope until it was high enough to manhandle into place. The lead lumberjack was glad they had picked a calm day, or this could be a real dangerous job. Tom had connected the coax cable to the antenna, and all they had to do was mount the antenna to the clamps with u-bolts and torque the U-bolts. Once the antenna was mounted, they disconnected the rope, and Tom lowered it to the ground while they climbed down 10 feet and started screwing eye screws into the tree. They put 3 8" eye bolts into the tree 120 degrees apart while Tom and Ralph hauled the guy wires aloft. The climbers attached the guy wires to the eye bolts by twisting it several times, then slipping a small u-bolt clamp over the wire they had twisted into an eye, and clamped down on the wire. Once they had all 3 done, they started paying out guy wire while they descended. The lead climber stopped briefly every 6 feet and used an insulated staple to carefully attach the coax cable to the tree since Ralph had impressed on him that if the coax cable was damaged, the whole job was useless. They were on the ground an hour later, and they were tired. Ralph gave the lead climber a check for \$1,000.00 which was twice what he had requested. Ralph said they had earned it. Since they could use the money, they didn't argue, and shook Ralph's hand and headed back to the truck. They'd split a pitcher of beer before heading home with 2 months worth of rent and food money each, which would make their wives very happy.

Ralph and Tom took care of connecting the guy wires to the anchors, which were simply augured into the ground, since Tom wanted the tree to flex, just not too much. Tom saw the pile of conduit, and the trench, and was glad Ralph thought ahead, and started feeding the coax through the conduit, gluing the connectors on at the end of every 10-foot section, and connected the sections until they had reached the house. Ralph took a wood-boring drill, and drilled a 1" hole through the wall where he wanted the cable to go. When he got to the wall, Tom drove a 8-foot grounding rod into the ground and connected a grounding wire to it. Next he fed the cable and the grounding wire through the hole, then they went inside to install the radio. Tom brought a 2-position switch to connect the antenna to a grounding path just in case a lightning strike hit the tree or the antenna.

Tom told Ralph that he could handle installing his own 2-meter antenna if he decided to get a base station for the 2-meter by driving a 12 foot pole 2 feet into the ground 10 feet from the house, and putting a commercial $\frac{1}{4}$ -wave omni ground-pane 2-meter antenna on it, or building his own, there were tons of designs on the internet for 2-meter antennas. Ralph asked if Tom could run 30 feet of coax through the wall, then seal the wall. Tom said he could put PL-259 connectors on each end, and seal the outdoor end with a cap and duct tape to keep it weathertight then coil it up outside the house, and hang it on a nail to keep it out of the snow. Ralph thanked Tom, and helped him finish the connections, including connecting the back-up battery to the battery bank with a large diode just like last time. Once they were finished, Ralph

said he could fly Tom back to Anchorage, or he could stay overnight, either at their place, or at the inn. It was only 2 o'clock, and they had at least 4 hours to darkness, and it would take Ralph right around 4 hours to fly there and back. Tom said that if they could give him a lift into town, he wanted to stop at the Moose Café and have a beer, then he'd stay overnight at the inn if Ralph could fly him back to Anchorage tomorrow. Ralph handed him a check for the job, and an extra \$50 to cover the room, dinner, and a short pitcher of beer. Tom asked him if he wanted to join him, but Ralph said he didn't drink. Ralph dropped Tom off, and went straight back home to Sam.

Ralph must have had his thinking cap on, because when he got home, he asked Sam if she were ready to take her General test, since he had to fly Tom back to Anchorage tomorrow anyway. Sam said she'd been ready for weeks. He called Virgil, and explained the situation. Since there were only 3 VE's in the club, and they were all Extras, Virgil said he'd call Ralph right back. An hour later, he said that it was irregular, but under the circumstances, the 3 of them were available tomorrow, so they could give a General testing session tomorrow for the 2 of them. They had to meet at Virgil's house since they didn't have time to book their usual testing room. Sam asked Ralph to make sure that Marge was available to babysit. Ralph offered a \$100 donation to the club if they could take the test tomorrow morning, and Marge could babysit. Since the test fee was \$12.00 each, that meant they were donating \$76.00 to the club, so Virgil said OK. He called up the Volunteer Examiner Coordinator, and explained the situation. He approved it since they lived over 300 miles away, and it wasn't a good idea to make them make a special trip, since Virgil said the other VE's were available. Virgil called Ralph back, and said they could do the General test tomorrow. Ralph asked how to get to Virgil's house. He was tempted to suggest they take a cab, then asked where he could meet them. Ralph said they were dropping Tom off after he installed his new antenna and multi-band transceiver. His truck was parked at the Anchorage International Commercial Delivery area. Virgil said he could meet them there. Ralph said they would be landing around 10:00 tomorrow morning. Virgil said he'd see them then and hung up.

They picked up Tom the next morning, and drove to the SuperGoose. The 3 of them loaded the plane, and Sam belted Bert and Larry into their seats, then sat next to them. Ralph would have to fly the plane by himself because she knew they'd cry all the way there if she weren't near them. 2 hours later, they arrived at Anchorage, and helped Tom unload his stuff. Virgil drove up right as they finished, and he helped. They all piled into Virgil's F-450 for the drive out to his house. When they got close, they realized that Virgil's house was a little more than a house, and he had maybe 20 acres including a huge garden, and numerous small livestock. A huge dog ran out to greet them that made Moose look like a runt. Virgil got out first, and the dog ran over to him. "Easy Bear, they're friends, and they're not here to play with you, so go lay down."

Bear trotted off and laid down on the porch. Ralph asked "What kind of dog is that?"

"Near as we can tell, it's a cross between a Bull Mastiff and a Rhodesian Ridgeback. You can

see why we call him Bear!"

"He makes Ron's dog Moose look like a Toy Poodle. How much does he weigh anyway?"

"Last time we got him on a scale, he weighed 170 pounds."

"Did he ever have any puppies?"

"Nope, all the female dogs around here are afraid of him."

They went inside, and met the testing team. Virgil introduced Slim, Elmer, and Bob. They looked older than dirt, and probably helped Samuel Morse write the original Morse code back in 1835.

Virgil said "Now that we've got the introductions over, let's get down to business. Here's a legal pad and pencil. We need to go into the other room that's set up with booths and headsets for the code part of the test. All you need to do is copy 5wpm. When we're ready to start, we'll blink the light, then start the tape. There's a 30-second introduction, then the test."

Ralph and Sam sat down and got ready. When the light blinked, they were ready to go. 5 minutes later, they turned their test sheets and paper in. Half an hour later, Virgil said "You both passed. Now for the 35-question exam." He handed them the testing materials, then told them to proceed. They both finished half an hour later, and gave their test booklets to Virgil, then sat down and waited. 10 minutes later Virgil came out. "You both passed, but I can't understand that you each only missed one question. Hardly anyone only misses 1 question."

"We're both doctors, and frankly studying for the FCC license was a walk in the park compared to medical school. We had to memorize all the bones in the body, and where they were, so we're used to memorizing stuff."

"Ok, here's your certificates, your updated licenses should arrive in the mail from the FCC in a couple of weeks. You can go ahead and start transmitting as soon as you get home, just use your old call signs, since you're not getting new ones. Just carry the General upgrade next to your FCC license, and post it next to your FCC shack license." They walked out to the truck, and Marge handed the boys back. On the ride back to the plane, Ron told Virgil that they probably would never see each other again, but thanks for everything. Virgil told them to go ahead and use their 2- meter HT's on their repeaters any time they were in Anchorage. Doc Nelson had applied for his own membership, so since they weren't going to be using it much, they'd consider their 25 dollar fee a lifetime membership unless they moved back to Anchorage, and started using the repeaters a lot. He looked forward to talking to them on the radio. Once they got to the airport, Ralph and Sam shook Virgil's hand, then they boarded the aircraft and flew back to Allakaket.

Chapter 57 - Changes

Ron thought about the situation with 4 shooters and only 1 M -200, and called Gene, who e-mailed Ronnie Barrett, who replied that they were sitting on 5 unsold M-200s that they were going to take a loss on anyway. They could ship them to Allakaket Airlines as part of their on-going T&E contract (CYA) with a 10,000 round shipping crate full of the last of that particular lot of Lake City Ammo. Gene asked Ron if he had any of the new Night Vision scopes for the M -200, and he just happened to have 5 daylight and 5 night vision scopes with them, since they were sold as a set, along with 5 spare magazines each. Gene suggested they ship them to Anchorage, and they'd pick them up. Ronnie said they'd have to go to Elmendorf for security reasons. Actually Ronnie didn't want to mess with shipping them commercial, and knew the CO of the local airbase, who would fly them via MAC to Elmendorf and call it a training mission, saving them thousands of dollars in shipping costs, and a weeks worth of headaches. Gene knew they couldn't be picky, so he said Elmendorf would be fine.

2 weeks later, Gene got a call from the CO of Elmendorf that several very heavy packages had shown up at Elmendorf, and could he send someone over to pick them up, they were in the way. Gene called Ron, said the packages were at Elmendorf, and would he be so kind to go pick them up. Ron called the airport, and had them prep a SuperGoose for a heavy cargo flight to Elmendorf. Half an hour later, he was at the airport, the seats and carpeting were removed, and the turbines were idling. He climbed aboard, set the plane up for take-off, entered Elmendorf's coordinates into the nav system, and received permission to take off. As soon as he was within range, he called Elmendorf, and received landing permission. As usual, he'd follow a "follow-me" truck that would be waiting for him. When he landed, he was escorted to a secure igloo with his stuff in it. The MP guarding it asked for Ron's ID. He remembered to hand him his TS ID instead of his Federal CCW. The guard thanked him, and handed him a manifest for the shipment, then a forklift loaded the plane from the rear. It was a tight clearance, but he could drive far enough up the rear ramp to load the rifle cases first (still in shipping crates) then the ammo so the load would be as close to balanced as possible. Ron saw that the security tags on the boxes hadn't been touched, thanked the MP and the loader, and climbed back aboard, lifted the tail ramp and secured the doors, then taxied back to the runway. He received clearance right as he reached the runway, and took off in ground effect since he was heavy. He slowly climbed to 2,000 feet and landed very gently in Allakaket. He called ahead and suggested they get their small forklift to unload the plane. Ron called Bear and asked him what they should do with the rifles and ammo. Bear said there was room in the armory now that they shot off some of the .223 in practice, so they could stick them there. Ron asked the forklift driver to take the crates to the armory, which was right around the corner anyway. They set the crated ammo down with the crated rifles next to it. Ron counted boxes, and came up with 5 rifle crates, and a crate marked Lake City, BMG 50 Match, and the lot number that matched his original lot of Lake City Ammo. He realized the crate was full of 10,000 rounds of Lake City BMG 50 Match ammo, and that someone either was being really nice, or expected him to practice a lot! When he got home, he called Gene, and told him the ammo and the rifles were in the armory, and he

was going to call Ron Barrett personally and thank him.

5 minutes later “Ronnie Barrett, Hi this is Ron Williams. I just got the shipment, and I wanted to thank you personally.”

“Ron, we were going to write it off anyway, some Liberal Idiot in Congress objected to us selling “Sniper Rifles” to the Army, so they shit-canned the contract to buy 200 units. The USMC took advantage of the Army’s screw-up and bought 195 of them. They would have taken the whole 200, but they didn’t have that many sniper teams. We might be able to do it next year, because I heard that this yo-yo is up for re-election, and the guy the Republicans are running against him has a substantial lead so far. Thanks for taking us up to your place in Alaska, We all had fun. I heard Doc opened a lodge right behind you. I tried to book it for a week, but they were booked solid.”

“Ronnie, any time you want to go hunting up here, just give me a call or an e-mail, and I’ll set it up for you.”

“Thanks Ron, I’ll do that - I got to go, I’ve got a meeting in 5 minutes.”

Ronnie Barretts had just given them at least \$60 thousand worth of rifles, and another \$20 thousand worth of ammo. Any time he wanted to come up and go hunting, Ron would put them up in his own lodge if he had to. Ron was going to be busy flying hunters back and forth to Doc’s Lodge, and he had an idea. He checked with BA, and Steve was busier than a 1-armed paper hanger, flying grocery runs twice a week, and flying back and forth to Fairbanks the other 3. Ron asked if Steve were transferred to Fairbanks for the season, would it make things easier.

“Not only easier, but way more profitable. Who’s going to fly the grocery run?”

“I was going to ask Ralph Lacombe, we’re loaning them the SuperGoose anyway.”

“OK, go ahead and ask him, but be nice!”

“Right BA - I’m always nice!”

Ron called Ralph, and asked if he could come over. Ralph said OK, so Ron drove over there. 10 minutes later, they were talking on the porch. “Ron, this Retirement thing Sucks! I’ve got my Honey-do’s all caught up, and I’m running out of things to do.”

“Talk about an answer to a prayer. I need someone to fly the SuperGoose 2 trips a week to Anchorage for the grocery run to keep the General Store stocked. You’re just flying, we have handlers on both ends that load and unload the plane, you don’t even need to check the manifest, since it’s all coming here anyway, and we check it on this end.”

“Great Ron, where do I sign up?”

“Thanks Ralph, you’re next flight is tomorrow morning. You need to be to the airport at 0745 to pre-flight the aircraft, since you need to be in Anchorage by 1000. The plane will be fueled and the turbines idling when you get there, so you don’t have to take care of that.”

“Ron, this is perfect, I love flying - I’d even do it for free!”

“Great because we’re not paying you for it, instead we’ll pick up all the costs of maintaining and fueling the craft for your personal use.”

“I kind of figured this would happen, I guess it beats splitting wood. OK, I’ll be there bright and early tomorrow.”

As Ron walked back to his truck, he hoped he wasn’t taking advantage of his friend. He was going to walk back and tell him to forget it, but Ralph was a big boy, and if he didn’t want to do it, all he had to do was say so. The fuel and maintenance costs of flying a SuperGoose could amount to a whole bunch of money, and he guessed that was how Ralph saw it. Besides now he really was an employee of the airlines, so that would make all their arrangements to use the Range and the General Store Kosher.

Ralph walked back in and gave Sam the good news.

“What do you mean you’re flying two trips a week to Anchorage for free!”

“Sam, first of all, I’m going nuts around here with nothing to do, second of all, Ron’s paying for all the fuel and maintenance costs of us using the SuperGoose. That’s a bunch of money! Aircraft Mechanics charge a couple of hundred dollars per hour, and turboprops are maintenance hogs, plus his fuel costs are going up.”

“Ok, since you put it that way. But you’re only going to be gone 2 days a week, right!”

“Yeah, and I’ll even be home by noon.”

“Ok Raphael Lacombe, but make sure you keep up with your chores, and spend time with the boys.”

Ralph walked up to Sam, and said “You know I love you and the boys more than anything. I just need something to do each week besides chores.”

The next morning, Ralph was up at 0700, and was out the door at 0730 with a thermos full of coffee and a bag full of muffins. He made it to the airport at 0745, and was airborne by 0800. Everything went according to plan until he was flying back to Allakaket, when he saw

something streak up at the aircraft from the ground. He felt a bang, and grabbed the microphone "Mayday...Mayday..Mayday. This is SuperGoose 1, I've been hit by ground fire, and I need emergency clearance to Allakaket.

"SuperGoose the pattern is clear, we'll have fire and ambulance rolling. Good luck!"

Ralph concentrated on getting his wounded bird down in 1 piece. The controls felt mushy, but they still responded, so he made a normal approach, and landed faster than normal, and used the reversible props to stop before he reached the end of the lake. He turned and taxied back to the ramp, deployed his landing gear, and carefully drove up to terra firma. As soon as the plane was safely parked, he shut it down as fast as possible, and threw the battery switch just in case. Ron and BA looked at the aircraft, and the only damage was some shrapnel damage to the rudder and rear elevators. Ron told Ralph he might have gotten lucky, he just got his feathers singed. Ron called Bear, who flew down in the 007, and was on the phone to Gene and the FAA on the way down. The FAA declared a local Air Emergency, and grounded all flights for the duration. No one wanted to be flying anyhow if someone on the ground was shooting at them. The Allakaket tower called Bear, and said they got a weak return headed from just west of Allakaket southbound to Fairbanks. It was only moving at 50mph, so it would take a while to make Fairbanks. Gene drove up, and talked to Bear. They got both 007's airborne in pursuit, since it would take too long to configure the CH-53E Super Stallion as a gunship, and if they were flying ultra lights, the GE Minigun would cause a fatal crash, and Bear wanted these guys alive. The Allakaket military radar got a better fix on them, and vectored them to the aircraft. It was an ultra-light 2-seater. Bear and Gene conferred on the radio, and talked to Don, who told them they should force the aircraft down, since they might have a pickup point before Fairbanks, and they'd loose them. That was all the encouragement Bear needed. He told the pilot of his 007 to motor out the weapons pods, and try to force the guy down gently. The pilot used his rotor wash to upset the aircraft, and when he fired a Zuni rocket ahead of his flight path, he got the hint, and chopped his throttle, and landed on a strip of beach. Bear had his M - 4 out and pointed at the aircraft as they stopped rolling.

"Ok, you two, come out with your hands up!"

The pilot and copilot threw out their personal weapons, because right at that moment, Gene's 007 had them in a cross-fire, with his nose pointed right at them and his weapons pods out. They climbed out onto the beach, and laid face down in the sand spread-eagled just like Bear ordered. He searched them both thoroughly, then bound and gagged them with a roll of duct tape, and dumped them in the back of the 007. They flew to Allakaket with Bear pointing his M - 4 at them all the time. Gene radioed ahead that they were en route to Allakaket with 2 prisoners. Bear took them to an abandoned hangar, and by the time the Marshals arrived to take custody of them, he had the whole story. There wasn't a mark on either one of them, so the Marshals took yes for an answer, and had them repeat their statements. It seems they were members of ELF - Earth Liberation Force, and they were sent there to kill Ron Williams, since his gold mine was helping to rape the land, and they were logging on his property as well.

Since they attacked a Commercial Aircraft, and there were conspiracy elements they charged them with Terrorism and a bunch of other crimes under the Patriot Act. Later that day, the President was notified, and he saw a golden opportunity to destroy the Democratic Party by shaking up their main contributors, and indicting some for aiding and abetting Terrorism by their huge donations to ELF. He ordered his Attorney General to form a task force to investigate contributions from famous liberals to ELF and other terrorist organizations. His AG wasn't born yesterday, and knew exactly what the President wanted to do. Even if all they did was indict them, the Court of Public Opinion would crucify them, and donations to all Liberal causes would dry up overnight, including the Democratic National Committee. He was still steamed over the election. There were numerous incidents of Voter Fraud, but he knew he couldn't prove it, and the media would say it was politically motivated.

Ron talked to Ralph, who explained that the ELF terrorists were after him, and since Ralph was flying SuperGoose #1, they assumed it was him. Ron wouldn't blame Ralph if he didn't want to fly again, but Ralph said he wanted to go back up, but this time, they'd fly Ron's plane. They climbed aboard Ron's VIP SuperGoose against Bear's advice, but they guessed correctly that there was only 1 team after him, and the coast was clear. They took off from Allakaket, and Ron turned the controls over to Ralph, who flew the plane for hours, and relaxed. Ron let him handle the landing, which was smooth as silk. Ron found out that the damage to Ralph's plane was cosmetic, and they had already patched up the plane. Since the SuperGoose had an aluminum skin, it was easy to fix, and the repairs were barely noticeable. Bear theorized that ELF had gotten hold of an old 1980's technology Stinger missile without the all-aspect infrared seeker head. The older missiles needed a hot jet exhaust to home in on, and probably never got a good lock on the SuperGoose's much cooler exhaust, so it detonated safely behind it.

Later that day, Bear realized that Ron was probably right, and called Don at the Anchorage FAA office, who lifted the flight restriction. The next day, flights returned to normal. Gene was furious when he found out the Allakaket operators had shut down the Military radar, since they claimed it interfered with their FAA radar. He called Elmendorf, and they sent a radar technician over, and tuned the radar so it wouldn't interfere. Gene left strict instructions that the military search radar was to be running and manned 24/7, and Ron, BA, or himself needed to be notified ASAP if it wasn't working properly. Ron and BA hired another operator to ensure that the radar set would be manned 24/7. 2 days later Ralph made another grocery run to Anchorage, which was totally uneventful. Ralph realized he had dodged a bullet, and if his number came up, there wasn't a lot he could do about it. One thing he did do was make sure his will was current, and he had enough life insurance. Of the 4 of them Nancy took it the hardest, because people were still trying to kill her husband. Short of mounting military flare and chaff dispensing hardware on all their aircraft, they'd just have to rely on the military radar to detect incoming threats. Ron knew the military radar would have detected even the ultra-light, since it had a large wingspan, and the main members were steel or aluminum, which reflected radar very well; and the flare and chaff dispensers weren't really an option, because they were obvious, and might scare customers away.

They flew to Bear's range to get some practice in. Ron had loaded the 5 M - 200 rifles and ammo on board and throughout the day everyone tried shooting it. Ron wasn't surprised to learn that after him and Jake, Sarah and Samantha were the next best shots with the Barrett M - 200. They weren't shooting sub-moa groups yet, but given time and practice they could. Bear wanted to include his sons Tom and Gary in the Militia, and teach them long distance shooting, but they were a bunch of Squirrels. They were doing OK with their AR-15's, but couldn't concentrate enough to shoot either the M -25 or the Barrett M -200. Ron talked with Bear, and he agreed that Ron and Jake would be their primary long-distance shooters, backed up by Ralph and Josh respectively, and Sarah and Sam would make a 3rd team if needed. Each one of the M -200 sniper teams could command a mile of terrain around them if they got to a good location. The assistant sniper, for lack of a better word, would be equipped with a Springfield Armory M - 25, and they could all shoot 3-inch or smaller groups at 600 yards with that rifle, and they had more firepower on tap with a 20-round magazine. David, Tom, and Gary were coming along, but needed some more maturity before they would be useful shooters. Nancy was a good shooter, but Bear realized that she didn't have what it took to take another life at long distance, and would be more useful running the shelter, and organizing the women and children into a self-defense force for a last-ditch defense of the shelter, and the children. Bear and Gene had organized the town and surrounding area into several self-defense forces, and when the news of the ELF attack spread, they started taking their duties seriously again. Before then, the chance of the town getting attacked was a remote possibility in their minds, and the militia was a nice excuse to get out and shoot full-auto weapons and grenade launchers once a month.

Ralph started experimenting with the DX capabilities of his new radio, and found out that if he listened during certain times of the evening, he could hear broadcasts in CW with foreign call signs. He did some internet research, and found out that there were certain times of the day, and other factors that affected the ionosphere that allowed the 10-meter frequencies to travel around the world. He called Virgil on the radio, and he e-mailed him several pages of information the local Elmers had collected over the years about ionic propagation. He printed it, and put it in a folder next to his radio, and started a log book like Virgil suggested, which had the date, time, call sign, and strength of the signal. Slowly Ralph realized he needed to practice, so a couple of hours every week, he started DX'ing and collecting QSO cards. His farthest contact so far was from South Africa on a freak bounce. He called Virgil and told him about it. Virgil was seriously impressed, the furthest DX he had so far was a guy in Australia. Ralph's CW rate increased as he got better. Sometimes he'd establish contact via hand-keyed CW, then when he found another ham that was machine CW capable, they'd switch to packet or RTTY, so they could talk faster. He could type 40wpm, but only key CW at 10 wpm. He located several commercial SW broadcasts, and he wrote down the frequencies in his log book for future reference. BBC and the other big commercial broadcasts might come in handy later. The more he used the radio, the more things he realized it could do. This radio was way more capable than he thought, but when he bought it, he only knew it was one of the highest rated multi-band transceivers in the Kenwood line. Tom had done an excellent job recommending the Titan antenna, because he rarely needed to use the antenna tuner. The only thing he wished he had was a Yagi antenna with a rotator, so he could selectively listen in certain directions, because

sometimes the reception was better west to east, and sometimes east to west. He'd have to install 2 Yagis to do that, and didn't want to add the extra sail area to his antenna system they'd require.

Sam was glad that Ralph was taking this survival preparedness seriously, because she was reading some alarming stuff on the internet about the US and World economy, especially the oil shortage, and the chance that this winter would be one of the worst on record. She sent Ralph out to double their store of wood. He got Jake and Josh to volunteer, and soon had their wood supply doubled like Sam requested. Sam and Ralph had a huge garden that summer, and she spent a lot of time later that summer and fall canning like crazy. Ralph was flying planeloads of canning jars and lids from Anchorage for the next two flights, since the lodges were almost finished with hunting season, and had plenty of food in stock. Once the hunters went home, Sam and Ralph flew up to Doc's Lodge, shot 2 caribou, and the people at the lodge were nice enough to can the meat and make 100 pounds of sausage. Sam was glad that they'd do that for them, and gave them a \$50 tip each. Ralph brain tanned the skins, and they added to their collection of skins. The snow started early that winter, and didn't let up much.

Chapter 58 - Baby it's Cold Outside

The winter turned out to be one of the worst in recent history. Ralph and Sam were among the people who were prepared, but several older couples were caught short, not by funds, but by storage, and as soon as a break occurred in the storm, Ron organized a delivery service using snowmobiles and sleds to get emergency supplies to the families that were caught short. Ron and Nancy, BA and Sally drove their snowmobiles to the General Store, where they were loaded up and drove to several houses of elderly people in Allakaket. Ron decided that they needed to buy either a couple of snowmobiles or a snow cat for next year.

Ralph couldn't stand it any longer, and decided to start on a dream project. He had enough room in his garage for 4 vehicles, so they had plenty of room for him to turn it into a shop. At one time, Ralph was a Certified Welder before he entered medical school. He explained to Sam that he wanted a trade in case he couldn't complete Medical School, so he got all the training and got certified as a Journeyman welder, and while he was at it, he took classes in design and fabrication. One of his class projects was to design a tubular-frame dune buggy, and the entire class built it. He did some internet research, and except for the shipping, the materials weren't too expensive.

"What do you want with a Dune Buggy out here?"

"How about a 4-seater snowmobile with a 1600cc VW motor?"

"That's almost as nuts, but go ahead if you have to."

Ralph took that for a "Yes" and started ordering supplies and equipment. He made several trips to Anchorage that winter. Flying the SuperGoose with skis on it was an experience! He ordered a MIG welding set, an oxy-acetylene welding setup and a set of frame welding jigs. He almost forgot to order a copy of AutoCAD, and was stunned to learn that the stupid software cost more than most of his parts. Since he had to have it, he bought it, and hoped he could use it again. While the parts were arriving, he got his basic tubular 4-seater chassis design down in the machine, and printed up a parts list that called out tube type, diameter, bends, etc. and contacted a company in Fairbanks that did tube bending. Ralph thought they should be handing out Vaseline with their quotes, but didn't have the know-how to bend the tubing right the first time, or the expensive equipment, so he approved the quote. They called him when all his tubes were cut to length and bent according to his design. Now all he'd have to do was fly down to Fairbanks, pick it up, and start welding. The 1600cc VW motor and transmission had shown up from the VW Store in St. Johns, PA. They were confused about his request to set it up to run on Avgas, until he explained that up in Allakaket Alaska, you either ran a motor on Avgas, Diesel, or JP-5, because that was all they had. He wanted them to build the motor for reliability and horsepower. They said that would cost extra, and would come in between \$1500 and \$2,000. If he wanted it balanced and blueprinted, that would add another \$500, bringing his total to \$2500.

He approved the \$2500, because he didn't want to have to rebuild this motor any time soon. The engine and transmission arrived in separate crates, and he was glad that they had a forklift to get it in and out of the SuperGoose. They weren't that heavy, just heavy enough to use the forklift.

The rest of his parts came in separate crates, and he was quickly running out of room. He decided to move his IH Traveler outside for the winter, since they only drove the Suburban now. He put a tarp over it, and drained all the fluids to keep them from freezing. Now he had enough room to work. He started assembling the tubing sections for the roll cage frame, and once he had them aligned, he locked the jig and started welding the tubing with his MIG welder. Several weeks later, the frame was together, and he started bolting parts onto it. He installed the engine and transmission in the conventional position, and mounted his upper and lower control arms, and the VW front suspension. He modified the front axle and designed a mount out of billet aluminum to carry a rough-water Slalom ski, which he hoped would be enough to carry the weight up front. Ralph had the part fabricated at the machine shop, and installed a flat-wound coil spring inside it to keep the ski tips up if the front end unloaded for any reason. He ordered a set of Hella Motorcycle lights, and a set of conventional fog/driving lights since he had dual Mitsubishi 60-amp alternators running off the engine, and a dual battery set-up up front. The body was made out of sheet metal, attached to the frame with Dzus fittings so he could replace damaged sections. There were cut-outs in the sheet metal for the headlights and fog lights, which were recess mounted and covered by pieces of Lexan. He had enough room up front for a 10-gallon fuel cell and 2 Interstate AGM batteries with an isolator. He ordered another Kenwood mobile radio, installed it on the passenger side, and mounted the antenna on the roof. With the roll cage, he installed 4-point racing belts and 4 racing bucket seats. Ralph replaced the stock emergency brake with a cutting brake, which was the best way to turn the snowmobile, since if he braked the inner track, the outer one would keep spinning, and would propel the vehicle in the direction of the braked track. The front end still steered, but a cutting brake worked better and quicker. The other controls were conventional: gas, clutch, and brake. The floor brake activated both tracks to stop the vehicle.

Instead of conventional doors, he cut the tubes, installed pivot pins on the bottom and spring-loaded locking pins on the top, and had the doors flop down to enter. They were skinned with lightweight diamond plate on both sides so you could safely step on them. Ralph was bummed that he finished building it too late to do anything more than run it in the slush to make sure it worked. He bought all the parts from a snowmobile dealer to replicate the suspension and track of a snowmobile, and used an adjustable coil-over shock to the rear pulleys to attach the back of the track to the vehicle so he could adjust the ride height for 2 or 4 people. Ralph thought his idea was pretty ingenious, and couldn't wait for next winter to check it out. Sam took one look at it, and called it the Snow Bug. Ralph went with the idea, and painted it June bug green. When Ralph told her the Snow Bug was heated, she got a little more enthusiastic about riding in it. He had a full Lexan windshield with electric wipers and a washer system, and a sheet metal roof over the roll cage to keep the snow off their heads. The sides were open, but they were going to be wearing snowmobile suits and helmets anyway.

Ralph guessed the Snow Bug could hit 100 mph if he could find a place flat enough and long enough, and if he had the nerve. Ralph installed a continuous skid plate underneath, and added Teflon sliders so if the vehicle grounded or high-centered, it would slide on the long strips of Teflon running from the front to the rear of the bug. When Ron got a good look at it, first he laughed his socks off, and then he was intrigued. He suggested attaching a pintle-type towing hitch to the rear, and mounting fenders and mud flaps to the rear so if they were towing something they wouldn't get buried in snow. Ron said if the prototype worked, Ralph might be busy building some more. He asked how much the cost, and Ralph said the parts came in around \$8-10 Thousand, but a lot of that was prototyping expenses for the machined parts. He guessed that he could build copies for \$15-20 thousand each and give himself a decent amount of money for his labor without gouging his friends. If he were to build them for anyone else, they'd cost over \$20 thousand each unless he sold the design to someone who could make them on an assembly line, then the per-unit cost would drop back to around \$10 thousand, including mark-up for the seller. Retail might be \$12-15 Thousand with dealer and distributor mark-ups.

Finally spring arrived, and Ron flew up to their lodge to check on it, and heard scratching at his lodge door. He opened the door, and a female wolf was sitting there holding a small runt in her mouth, and set him down in front of Ron. He knelt down, and told her "Ok girl, I understand. We'll take care of him, so don't worry." She laid down, licked her pup, and Ron petted her, then she turned and walked away. Ron rummaged around and found a hot water bottle, put the pup on the bearskin rug, and made some formula from memory. He called Nancy, who said they couldn't keep it, because they already had Starsky and Hutch. Ron called Ralph, and told him that the runt needed to be adopted or it would die. Ralph said to bring it over, and Ron bundled the pup in a caribou skin blanket after he fed it, and tucked a fresh hot water bottle in the blanket, then ran out to the plane, put the pup on the floor next to him, turned the heater on, and flew home. He drove to Ralph's place, and dropped off the wolf cub. Ron told Ralph everything he needed to know to successfully raise the pup. Sam wasn't very happy at all, then remembered what Anne said about them raising Oliver. The pup was a dead-ringer for Oliver according to Ron, so Ralph thought that they might call him Oliver. Once Sam saw Oliver, all her objections vanished, she thought he was too cute for his own good. Ron dropped off a case of evaporated milk and Karo syrup, disposable bottles, hot water bottles, and the caribou skin along with Oliver, so they were set.

Bert and Larry were both crawling, and Ralph followed Ron's advice and put them together on the bearskin rug at naptime. The 3 of them curled up together, and were fast asleep. When they woke up, Ralph had a bottle of wolf formula ready to go, then he took Oliver outside to do his business. He rubbed Oliver's butt with a dampened piece of cotton ball, and he squatted and pooped right there. When he was finished, Ralph praised him, took him back inside, and he sacked out with Bert and Larry. Sam was starting to appreciate Oliver, because Bert and Larry didn't tend to wander off and get into mischief when they had Oliver to keep them company. Ralph made sure that he and Sam imprinted on the cub as well, because the safest wolf was a thoroughly imprinted and socialized wolf. Anne called up and asked if she and Gene could come over to see the new wolf, Ron had blabbed and told her how much this runt resembled

Oliver. They came over later that afternoon, and Anne started crying almost immediately. This wolf cub was a dead ringer for Oliver, which brought back all kinds of memories. Gene held her for a while, then she petted Oliver for a while, then they had to go. Ralph didn't understand, he had hoped the puppy would make Anne happy. He'd have to talk to Ron later.

Once the weather warmed up, Bear said his range was open again, and they made up for lost time. Ron and Jake shot their M-200s and everyone else shot their M-25s. Jake knew he was rusty when his first group of the season at the 1,000 yard line measured out at 12 inches. Ron wasn't a happy camper either. His first group was 10 inches, and he hadn't shot that badly since he was a little kid. Ron examined the range carefully through his scope, checking mirage. Suddenly he spotted it - there was a localized breeze flowing through the draw between their shooting position and the target, and it seemed to be a variable breeze. That could account for part of it, but he was sure that he was rusty too, since the last time he shot his M-200 was when he was training Delta shooters last year at Bear's place. Even though the Army couldn't buy the Barrett M-200, that didn't stop the new JSOC, and based on General Shepard's recommendation, he equipped all his SF snipers with M-200's as well as their usual 30-caliber rifles. Delta was the last group to filter through Bear's school, since they were busy doing something that even Bear and Ron couldn't know about.

By the end of the day, Ron's groups were back under 8 inches. Not as good as he'd ever done, but pretty good considering this was the first time he shot the rifle in 6 months. Jake showed up his dad by shooting a 7.5 inch group that was just smaller than his Dad's. By the end of the day, everyone who was shooting an M-25 was shooting a group smaller than 6 inches at 600 yards, which was good enough for government work. Ralph wanted to get back to check on Oliver, and Sam wanted to see her kids, so they knocked off early, and they flew back to Allakaket. Over the winter, they had replaced the damaged control surfaces on Ralph's plane when Grumman offered to replace them for free in exchange for the damaged parts. They wanted to examine the control surfaces to see how well they survived a near-miss by a man-portable missile since there weren't too many cases of near-misses - the Stinger missile usually either totally missed or scored.

When they got home, Anne was petting Oliver, and feeling much better. Bert and Larry were asleep on the rug. Gene had gone to the range to practice, and would be back soon. Ralph sat down and talked to Anne. "I don't understand, last time you were crying when you saw Oliver, and today you seem fine?"

"I realized this beautiful puppy might look like Oliver, but he's not Oliver, so I decided to treat him just like a new puppy, and my memories of Oliver and Roy didn't bother me anymore."

"Sorry Anne, if I would have known, we would have called him something else."

"Don't worry about me, Oliver Junior is a beautiful wolf. Thanks for letting me spend time with him."

They picked up the boys and Oliver and went home. Ralph made dinner since Sam was tired, then he checked to see if anything new was going on with the radio. A couple of Elmers were just chewing the rag on the 440 band since it was too early for the HF bands to open up for DX communications. Ralph shut the radio down and helped Sam give the boys a bath. Once they were down for the night, Ralph and Sam took a shower, and went to bed early. Ralph was concerned because Sam was acting lethargic, and asked her what was up. She said she didn't know, but she wasn't running a fever or anything. Ralph asked if she wanted to go to Anchorage tomorrow and have some blood work done to make sure her hormone levels were ok. Thanks to her miscarriage and hysterectomy, she was on hormone replacement therapy, and Ralph was concerned that they needed to adjust her dosage. She said that Doc Miller could draw the blood, but Ralph said that he still needed to send it to Anchorage Regional for testing, so she might as well be seen at Anchorage. He called Anne, and explained the situation, and she said that she'd watch Bert, Larry, and Oliver for them tomorrow, and Sam should definitely go to Anchorage Regional, because Doc Miller was pretty weak on OB/GYN unless it was either pregnancy or delivery. That settled it in Ralph's mind, and he called the airport, and asked that SuperGoose #1 be ready for flight at 0800 tomorrow.

The next morning, Sam was even weaker, so Ralph took care of everything, got the boys and Oliver in the Suburban, then helped Sam into the passenger seat. He checked her temperature while he helped her in, and he thought she might be a little warm, but not feverish. He dropped the boys and Oliver off at Anne's and helped Sam into the SuperGoose, and had her sit up front where he could keep an eye on her. 2 hours later they arrived at Anchorage Regional. Doc Nelson was on, and took her in immediately after talking to Ralph. They ran the blood work Stat, and her hormones were out of whack, but her blood sugar was low too, which surprised everyone. Doctor Nelson guessed the hormone problems might have been masking her hypoglycemia. Instead of starting an IV, he ordered a glass of orange juice from the cafeteria. Once she drank that, she felt better. Doc Nelson handed her a bunch of paperwork about Hypoglycemia, and a different prescription for her hormone drugs. Since Ralph and Sam were both doctors, he knew that they would make sure that Sam took care of herself, since they both knew how dangerous hypoglycemia was. Sam picked up a glucose monitor and a 3-month supply of test strips, lancets, a lancet gun, and boxes of alcohol preps at the hospital pharmacy on the way out. She bought the new type that could read accurately anywhere on her body so she wouldn't damage her fingers, since she was still a qualified surgeon and her hands were her livelihood.

They flew back to Allakaket, and Sam told Anne what had happened. She hugged Sam, and said that if she hadn't gone to Anchorage, she might not have lived much longer, because Doc Miller would never have run the entire battery of blood tests like an ER would automatically, and he might have missed the hypoglycemia. They drove home, and after putting the boys and Oliver down for a nap, Sam checked out the WebMD website since they had bought out MedLine, and used her password to access the database, and got more information on Hypoglycemia than she needed or wanted. She inserted a couple of extra words and Boolean operators to limit the search, and she struck pay dirt, and bookmarked the page so she could

come back and read the articles at her leisure. She spent the rest of the afternoon reading the doctor's paperwork, which probably was copied from the same source, since it listed most of the same articles. She found out how to regulate her blood sugar, and found out that careful monitoring of her blood sugar was the critical element, so she was glad she bought the glucose monitor. Ralph was glad his wife was OK, but realized how dangerous hypoglycemia was, and knew the only thing he could do for her he wasn't already was to pray. They could monitor her blood sugar, and modify her lifestyle, but she really couldn't go anywhere without her glucose monitor and kit, and some glucose tabs and gel for emergencies, since if her blood sugar got too low, she could go into a coma.

Chapter 59 Snow Bugs

Allakaket Airlines had another good year, and Oliver grew up with Bert and Larry. They were now inseparable. Nancy warned Sam about the kids trying to drink out of the dog's bowl, so she kept the kids away from Oliver's food and water bowls. As they grew older, their play got more physical, but neither Bert nor Larry was really hurt when Oliver pushed them over. The first time he did it and started licking Bert's face, Sam almost lost it then and there. Ralph came running in, and calmed Sam down. She was ok when she saw that they were just playing, and Bert was giggling like he did when Sam tickled him. Sam had gotten her hypoglycemia under control, and wasn't symptomatic, but only because she religiously checked her blood sugar at least 4 times a day, and watched her diet. Doc's Lodge was booked solid again this year, and Doc realized he would have been less busy if he had kept practicing medicine.

Sam and Ralph got together with Bear and started training up the Militia's Medics into Paramedics, and Bear issued the military surplus gear he got from General Gene Shepard before he retired. The stuff that needed replacing on a regular basis they got from the state when they took their State Paramedic tests. The 2 weeks at Anchorage Regional was a walk in the park compared to studying under Sam and Ralph, who were perfectionists. "There is only 1 way to do this, the right way!" was a phrase they had heard hundreds of times. A visiting Special Forces PJ/Medic spent an extra day talking to the newly minted paramedics about field expedient techniques, and they took extensive notes, as well as Bear getting the whole session on videotape. While they lacked the combat experience, Bear said that their training was as good as it could get without sending them to a war zone, and none of them wanted to volunteer for that. Since they were irregular forces, no one wore anything that would identify them as medics as long as they were wearing the woodland cammo that the militia wore on their exercises. Every militia member carried a battle dressing and a couple of other items in their right thigh cargo pocket of their BDU's, so if they were shot, the medic would know where to look, or they could treat each other for a gunshot by reaching for their wounded team member's right thigh pocket, and it would always be there.

All the militia members practiced 1 weekend every 6 months, which included 1 day of target practice, 1 day of field techniques, and a classroom day covering tactics, escape and evasion and Psyops. Bear felt the psychological aspects of Guerrilla warfare had been ignored since Vietnam, to the detriment of all branches of the Military, except Special Forces. He dispelled the "Murder Inc." fallacy that regular infantry sometimes felt about their own snipers, and explained they were there for 2 reasons. They could either kill troops that were attacking them while they were still out of range, or they could demoralize the enemy by killing their commanders, radio operators, and other targets of opportunity. One sergeant said that he was damn glad they had snipers, because that meant the bad guys would have a tougher time getting to his wife and kids. Their only fire support was either indirect fire support from their light mortars, or direct fire support from the armed choppers, Bradleys, Hummers, and the GE Mini-guns on their Vulcan Systems.

Every member of the militia was equipped with either a Bushmaster AR-15, or an M-16/M -203 of some variant. They really liked the M-203s since they were short on mortars, and had no long-range cannons. They had hand grenades, and anti-personnel mines for ambushes. Bear and Hunter had supervised the distribution and hiding of caches all over the area for resupply, or for use if they had to E&E. Most of them were simple 5-gallon buckets or PVC pipe buried in the ground, but some were more complex and bigger. They were so well hidden that unless you knew where it was, you'd never find it, and the only people who knew where they all were could be counted on 1 hand. Each team was responsible for an area, and only knew about the caches in their area, and 1 emergency cache. Bear was utilizing some of the aspects of the Viet Cong Guerilla tactics, and compartmentalized information, so if a team were compromised, they couldn't give away much.

Bear spent all the time he could with his #1 and #2 sniper teams training them in field craft and everything else they needed to know. Gene got a copy of the latest Marine Field Manual about Scout Sniper training, and gave it to Bear, who adapted it to their situation. Once they had been training a while, he realized he needed to switch team members around. Ron and Jake were still his designated shooters, but he teamed up Ron and Ralph, and Jake and Josh instead of the other way around. Jake was the older brother, so Josh didn't have a problem with taking orders from him, where Ralph resented taking orders from Jake, and Ron was too busy thinking about Josh to concentrate on the mission. One benefit he didn't realize until the switch, was Josh and Jake's zeros were close enough that they could use each other's weapons, and Ralph wasn't a good enough shot with the M -200 to matter. If he used Ron's Zero, he was close enough to hit a man-sized target at almost 1,000 yards, whereas Ron or Jake could pick which eyeball they wanted to shoot him in. Each sniper team was issued an M - 200 with 200 rounds of ammo and an M -25 with 1200 rounds, splitting the load between them. They each carried their personal sidearm, which for the 4 of them was their P-14 Limited with 4 mags plus 100 rounds and they each carried a suppressed Ruger 22/45 with 2 loaded mags and 100 rounds to spare. They carried their water in a Camelback, and minimal food. If they were out for any time, they could carry extra or raid a food cache near their hide if necessary. The assistant also carried a spotting scope or range-finding binoculars and a radio.

Once they were fully trained, Bear talked to Ron and Ralph, and got their reluctant permission to train Sarah and Sam into a 3rd team for backup. Sarah shot as well as her older brother, and if she wasn't a girl, Bear would have made her his 2nd sniper. Sam was progressing nicely with the M -25, and was routinely shooting 3-5 inch groups at 600 yards. Bear didn't load them up with ammo like he did with his first 2 teams, since they would stay closer to home, and would be easier to resupply. If enemy forces made it into Allakaket, they would take positions on the best vantage point and take out the leadership and heavy weapons with their first shots, then take out targets of opportunity after that. Sarah was disappointed in being Bear's #3 pick, until he sat her down and explained the facts of life to her, and what would happen to her if she were caught. Suddenly she saw the wisdom of not being at or ahead of the Forward Edge of Battle, and was perfectly willing to assume a more defensive role. By the end of the summer, they were ready to field 3 sniper teams if necessary. They were tired of constantly training, and

thought that Bear would give them the winter off. He told them "Fat Chance, what if they decided to attack in the winter?" so they spent several weekends freezing their butts off, and learning how to cross-country ski. Ron was glad he already knew how, and wound up as Bear's assistant teacher. Bear was no dummy, and stayed at home where it was warm while Ron skied back and forth with the sniper teams, set up bivouacs and hides, and generally froze their butts off. Finally when it reached 40 below, Ron called a halt to the winter training. He wasn't going to kill a team in training. Bear agreed, and magnanimously gave them the rest of the winter off.

Ralph and Sam went home and spent the next week sitting in front of the fireplace warming up. Finally the snow let up, and Ralph was getting cabin fever when he remembered the Snow Bug. Sam suggested he take the first test drive by himself, so he didn't take her out with him, so he suited up, filled up the gas and oil tanks, took the batteries off the trickle charger, and fired up the motor. After letting it idle for a while, he backed it up, turned it around, and drove down the driveway. Steering by using the cutting brakes was a new experience to him, and he narrowly missed several large trees before he figured it out. The front skis were just about useless for turning the Snow Bug, and were only useful for keeping it on the trail. Any serious steering was done with the cutting brake. With just one passenger, it accelerated like a dragster, so he learned to go easy on the throttle. VW parts had shipped several sets of speedometer gears, and after he bought the main drive pulleys, he selected the set recommended for that diameter pulley. He found out he could only go 10 mph in first gear, but it was a really low gear, so he could normally take off in second gear, which was ok to about 30mph. Third gear was good from about 20-50mph on flat ground, and forth gear went faster than he wanted to right now.

Once he got the hang of driving the Snow Bug, Ralph drove up to Ron's place and asked if he wanted to go for a ride. Ron put on his snowmobile suit, boots and jacket, then Ralph handed him a funny looking helmet. He explained it was the latest and greatest in Off-Road helmets with an inflatable collar that protected your neck from whiplash and other injuries. Once he had the helmet on and inflated, he stepped into the passengers' seat of the Snow Bug, raised and locked the door, and belted into the 4-point harness. Ralph checked Ron's harness, then secured his door, plugged their helmets into the intercom and belted himself in. The last thing he did was put on his gloves. Suddenly Nancy came running out with a daybag. Ralph thought it was a good idea, and had had her secure it to the seat in the back, then he started the VW motor and drove down to the fuel depot and topped off the tank with Avgas, and re-started the motor. After cruising around town for a while, Ron suggested they head for the lake, since the ice was several feet thick, and there was 4-6 feet of snow on top of that. Ralph called the tower and told them he was going to go driving out on the lake, and to call him if there were any planes approaching so he could get out of the way. The tower said that no one was scheduled to land until tomorrow's flight, so they were all clear, and to contact the tower when they came back off the lake. Ralph thanked the tower, and drove down the ramp to the lake, and motored around for a while. He got tired of that, and asked Ron if he wanted to catch some air. Ron turned his head, and shrugged, so Ralph handed him a brand-new mouthpiece and told him to use it so he wouldn't chip his teeth or bite his tongue. Suddenly Ron didn't think this was such a great idea. Ralph had spotted a small ridge he wanted to try, and once Ron said he was OK,

he gunned the throttle, and hit the 2-foot ridge at 40mph. It was enough to briefly lift the whole Snow Bug off the snow and fully unload the suspension. It set down safely 10 feet on the other side of the ridge without a bounce. Ralph knew he had the suspension dialed in, since he had ordered the Baja Championship suspension kit with dual long-travel coil-over shocks on the back and single coil-overs in the front. After they landed, Ralph flipped up his visor, pulled out his mouthpiece, and let out a Rebel Yell that scared the caribou in Fairbanks, not realizing that he was on hot mike. Luckily the intercom had a limiting filter, or Ron might have taken out his P-14 and shot him. Ralph heard a few words from Ron he'd never heard before. Finally when Ron calmed down, Ralph apologized, and said the next time he did that, he'd unplug from the intercom. Ron's hearing slowly returned again, and Ralph was asking him if he wanted to do it again. Ron said "As long as there's no yelling when you land!"

This time Ralph hit a 4-foot ridge at 40 mph, and flew almost 50 feet and almost 10 feet in the air. Once he was able to breathe again, Ron told Ralph that if he wanted to do any more flying with him, it was going to be in a plane. Ralph promised his flying days were over, since the Snow Bug started to get squirrelly in the air, and landed less elegantly than last time. Luckily since it was a rear-engine vehicle, the back came down first, and he rode a wheelie for 20 feet until the front end sat down. He was just enough out of shape that he didn't know what to do to recover, so he just held on until the Snow Bug got down on all 4 corners again. If Ralph had some Motocross experience, he would have known what to do. Fortunately they had over a mile of smooth snow to get it back under control. Ron decided he had enough and suggested they take it back to the barn. Ron suggested that Ralph didn't try flying with Sam in the passenger seat, since he didn't want to have to raise their kids because he did something foolhardy. Ralph swore his snowmobile flying days were over, he just wanted to do it once, because he saw a picture of a Championship buggy flying in Baja, and it looked fun. Ralph drove Ron home, then parked the Snow bug in his garage. He wanted to wait for the snow to melt off it before he checked the frame and shocks for damage.

The next day, Ralph looked as carefully as he could, and his first, last and only attempt at flying hadn't caused any obvious damage. He asked Samantha if they wanted to go for a ride. She was bored out of her gourd, so they bundled up the kids, strapped them into the back seats, and dropped them off at Anne's place. She now had a nice big sign over the door saying Anne's Babysitting Service. Ralph cracked up when he saw the sign, and told Anne they'd be back in a couple of hours. They cruised around town, and when they heard a helicopter coming in for a landing, Ralph decided to check it out. Bear climbed out and flagged them down. Ralph lifted his visor so he could hear Bear, and shut down the motor.

"What the heck is this?"

"It's a Snow Bug, Bear. I took a basic VW dune buggy design and converted it to a snowmobile."

"How fast does it go?"

“I don’t know, I chickened out at 50mph, but it had plenty of throttle left. If you were crazy enough, it could do between 80 and 100 on flat smooth snow.”

“Do you think you could mount a machine gun on it?”

“I don’t see why not, Chenowith built the prototype of the FAV, and this frame is similar.”

“Cool, let me talk to Ron, this might be an answer to prayer.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The Bradleys and Hummers don’t do so hot in deep snow, and your Snow Bug as you call it could solve that problem. If you mounted a M - 60 in front of Sam’s seat, and a Ma Deuce right where your antenna is, you’d have the same firepower as a Fast Attack Vehicle, and it would be about as fast and maneuverable. Bradley’s can’t safely travel faster than 20mph in deep snow, and the Hummers are stuck if the snow gets more than 4 feet thick and powdery. Once it’s packed, they do OK, but in fresh deep snow they bog down and become sitting ducks.”

“Ok, I get it; you want an armed snowmobile in case we get attacked. There’s no ballistic protection on this, and if you added armor, it would weight a ton, and probably wouldn’t be any better than a Hummer in deep snow.”

“How about Kevlar panels?”

“We could put Kevlar panels in the doors and up front. I’d have to re-design the rear end to cover the motor compartment, or 1 shot would put us out of action if it nailed a critical part of the motor, or the gas tank.”

“Great, you and Ron work on it. If you can make it bullet resistant, let’s say up to 30 caliber fire, it would be worth having about a half-dozen of them.”

“Ok, but with all the Kevlar and other stuff, you’re talking about \$30K per copy.”

“I think we could afford that out of petty cash!”

Ralph turned to Sam and said “Looks like I’ve got my winter project!”

Bear shuffled back to the helicopter and flew back home. Ralph and Sam drove over to Ron’s house. Nancy opened the door holding onto Starsky and Hutch’s collars. “Come on in, Ron’s expecting you.”

Ralph knew Bear had called ahead, so they went on in. Ron was in his office working on the computer. “Bear talked to me, and said your flying machine would make a perfect Fast Attack

Vehicle for the winter months.”

“That’s what he told me too. So where we gonna get the Kevlar and stuff?”

“Gene gave me some suggestions, and I’ve been searching the internet. Several companies make Kevlar panels for armored vehicles that would more than meet our needs. All they need are the dimensions of the door panels, engine compartment, and your nosepiece. They can make custom panels and ship them to us for installation.”

I wonder if The VW Store would give me a discount if we ordered 6 engines and transmissions at once?”

“There’s only 1 way to find out - ask!”

“I’ve got a line on some fuel cells that would be more bullet-resistant than the current fuel cell, and it only holds 1 gallon less. How different is your frame from the Chenowith 4-seater frame?”

“It’s almost identical, why?”

“If we ordered 6 cut and bent frames from Chenowith and assembled them ourselves, it wouldn’t take so long to build it, would it?”

“Not hardly. Why don’t we order completed frames?”

“Too big to ship cheaply, they’d charge us more for shipping than the frame costs.”

“Not exactly, they’re in California, and could ship by boat to Alaska, and the frames are light, so the Super Stallion could pick them up and sling load them here.”

“If you’re sure, I’d rather do it your way - it took me forever to weld up those frames.”

Ron looked up Chenowith Racing Products on the internet, and they found a 2-seater frame that would be perfect for an armed snowmobile setup, the 4LWD frame with the XO-103 off-road kit. They could fabricate a seat mount on top of the gas tank, or relocate it, and the Ma Deuce gunner would be sitting up high enough to have a 180 degree field of fire while the M -60 gunner could sweep a 120-160 degree area ahead of him. Adding Kevlar panels to the design would be easy. The frames only cost less than \$2,000 each, If Ralph could get a deal from the VW Store for 6 1600cc engines and transmissions, they’d be way ahead of the game, since Ralph’s estimate was \$10-15 thousand to build a copy, and they’d have a complete vehicle for less than \$8 thousand each plus shipping. Ralph wanted to add panels to the sides that covered more of the driver and passenger, and make them flip down like his doors did. That way they could protect the driver and passenger up to the shoulders with Kevlar panels.

The Ma Deuce Gunner would have to rely on his body armor, since he was sitting too high to be protected by the panels. If he added a roll cage to protect the gunner, he could at least add Kevlar panels to the sides and rear of the roll cage to protect the gunner, since couldn't swing the barrel of the Ma Deuce that far. The vehicle he had in mind would look pretty close to the FAV, except instead of off-road tires, it would have 2 huge Snowmobile tracks out back, and skis up front.

Ron e-mailed Chenowith, and they made him a pretty reasonable offer to ship 6 frames to Alaska with all the tabs and everything already installed. They even had a bracket to mount a seat over the gas tank, but could only sell it to the Military. General Shepard sent them an e-mail, and that took care of it. With General Shepard's e-mail, the owner of Chenowith Racing Products authorized shipment of special frames to Allakaket Airlines, Inc. for purposes of defense of a Government Contractor. When they received the frames 2 weeks later, they were all ready to go, including the bracket for the extra seat, the FAV roll cage, and the pintle mounts for the Ma Deuce and the M -60. Once Ralph got the parts from The VW Store, they were ready to assemble the vehicles. He e-mailed the Kevlar armor manufacturer the sizes of the panels he needed, and they were shipped to Alaska with installation instructions. Ron, Ralph and a couple of Allakaket Airlines mechanics spent the rest of the winter assembling the Snow Fox, since they couldn't call an armed vehicle a Bug. When they were finished, Ron e-mailed Chenowith Racing Products several photos of the Snow Bug and the Snow Fox. He got an e-mail back from the head of Chenowith's R&D department, asking if they could build more Snow Bug frames for other customers. If they sold well, Chenowith would pay Allakaket Airlines a licensing fee for each Snow Bug frame sold. Since the main difference was welding 2 brackets to the back of the Chenowith 4LWD frame to carry a dual coil-over shock setup, and mounting snowmobile tracks instead of wheels, Ron didn't expect the licensing fee to amount to much, so he said OK. Ron didn't realize how many frames Chenowith Racing Products sold each year, and when the new design hit their website, orders came piling in from people who wanted a convertible dunebuggy/snowmobile that could carry 4 passengers. Chenowith did something very smart, and contacted the distributor for the snowmobile parts needed to make the bug a snowmobile, and had them package the parts as a kit, and sell the kit through Chenowith's website. Chenowith not only sold the frames, but the conversion kit as well, and frames were flying out the door as fast as they could be made. Ron was surprised when he got a check from Chenowith Racing Products for \$10,000 dollars for 1 year's licensing fee. He gave the money to Ralph since it was his design.

Chapter 60 - Mix-up

When BA got a look at the Snow Fox, he tracked down Ron and told him “Ron, you got to replace those seats and belts right now, don’t you know those 4-points can get you killed?”

“How’s that?”

“If you get in a high-speed head-on collision, you’ll slide under the belts, and kill yourself. NASCAR and Trans-Am banned the 4-way belts years ago. Now all they allow are 5 or 6-point restraints, and the preferred one is the 6-point restraint.”

“Isn’t replacing all these seats and belts going to be expensive?”

“It’s better than going to someone’s funeral.”

“Ok BA, since you’re the expert here, you order them!”

Ron did some checking on the internet, and realized that the 5-point or 6-point harnesses were mostly used for circle-track racing or high-speed road racing on closed courses where a high-speed collision with a fixed object was likely. He called Chenowith Racing Products, who assured him the 4-point seat belts would be perfectly safe below 100 mph, and 99% of Baja 1000 racers still ran the 4-point system. Several of the Top Truck class racers with big bucks opted for the greater safety of the 6-point, but they had almost as much sponsorship money as a Winston Cup Racing team. Ron called BA, gave him the information he had learned right from the horse’s mouth so to speak, and BA dropped it. He had a valid point, but realized that if Chenowith shipped their dune buggies to racing teams with 4-point seat belt mounts, they must know what they were talking about, because the downside would be a huge liability lawsuit.

Ron got an idea, and ordered rims and tires from a dealer including sand paddle rear tires and knobbies for front and rear. Ron didn’t want to have to wait to winter to check the Snow/Sand Fox out, besides the mud during spring made the paddles pretty useful. Bear supervised mounting the M - 60 and the Ma Deuce to the Foxes, then had them airlifted to Alaska Survival for an extended testing and training session. They found that the M - 60 gunner could shoot while they were moving at high-speed, but shooting the Ma Deuce at any speed greater than 10 mph at anything more than a $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away would probably be wasting ammo. If the driver stopped long enough for the Ma Deuce Gunner to get set, he could hit stuff from about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away depending on how big it was, and where the gunner needed to hit it. The vulnerable targets on a Tank, APC, Bradley, or Hummer were awfully small. The good news was they had the ability to go toe to toe with any chopper except the Apache or Kiowa Warrior and have a decent chance of survival if they shot from a hidden spot, and got the first shot. Russian Hinds could absorb a lot of punishment, but there weren’t a lot of them left, and they really didn’t have the legs to fly far enough to be a threat in Alaska. Bear wisely added 4 Stinger launch

tubes to their arsenal to give them a chance against an armed and armored chopper, and 4 LAWS rockets in case they ran into something the Ma Deuce couldn't handle. Bear checked one of the Kevlar panels (they ordered spares for testing) and it stopped 30 caliber fire, even 7.62 AP rounds, but the BMG 50 rounds usually penetrated, so he told the Fox crews that the panels would hold up to small arms fire, but not a BMG-50 or bigger, and probably not against any RPG either. The Ma Deuce gunner in the crow's nest, as they called it, was eternally grateful for the Kevlar and sheet metal panels that surrounded his perch, but it took longer to get in and out, since the side panels hinged and locked, and they had to be secured before the vehicle could move, or the panel would self-destruct from getting slammed around.

With the testing session ended, Bear shipped half the foxes back to Allakaket, and stored them next to the Vulcan guns. Since it only took a couple of minutes to mount or dismount the weapons, and Ralph had welded on a pintle hitch to the rear of the Fox's frames, they could be used during the winter for hauling stuff. Ron located a supplier of Fiberglass/Aluminum snow sleds that should be able to haul a ton of stuff over packed snow. There were the same sleds used by Arctic expeditions, and were basically bulletproof. With 3 Snow Foxes, they could either transport emergency supplies to snowed-in families, or act as Medevac vehicles, since they didn't have ambulances. When the sleds arrived, Ralph designed and installed a canvas snow cover that prevented thrown snow from piling up on the sled, which was wide enough for a stretcher case and a paramedic to ride comfortably in.

Ralph dreaded the coming of good weather, because he got a look at Sam's Honey-do list. It was 3 pages long, and she was still writing. As soon as the weather was good enough to go logging, he borrowed Ron's tractor, Jake and Josh, and cut enough wood to last a year. Hauling it back to the house with the tractor made the work much easier. Ralph had gotten smarter and lazier in his old age, and built a hydraulic log splitter, so all he had to do was cut the logs to length, and the splitter would do the rest. He mounted it on a trailer, because he knew Ron and BA would want to borrow it. He bought a small diesel motor, hooked the output to a hydraulic pump, and the pump to a hydraulic ram using all the necessary valves and gizmos. The foot of the ram held a tool-steel wedge, and the ram had a 16-inch throw, so he could saw his logs to 12" lengths. When he ran the pump at high speed, he could split wood faster than he could with a wedge and sledge, and it was much less work. When he finished, Josh and Jake helped him stack the wood, and trailered the splitter to their house so they could cut wood at their place. Ralph had just scratched the surface of the honey-do list, so Ron said he'd excuse him from wood-cutting at his place to keep Samantha on his good side.

When he finished cutting and splitting the wood, Ralph made some phone calls to hardware and tool stores in Fairbanks. He located everything he needed for his next projects, and it could fit inside his SuperGoose. He called the stores back, placed an order for the items, and said he'd fly down to Fairbanks tomorrow to pick it all up. He called BA, who suggested he borrow the company F-450 diesel pickup in Fairbanks and load his stuff instead of paying a delivery company. The next morning, he flew the SuperGoose to Fairbanks, stopped at 2 hardware and 1 tool store, picked up some lumber, paint, painting supplies, hardware, a rotary floor

buffer/sander, a 5-gallon bucket of spar varnish and rollers to spread it. The buffer/sander weighed a ton, but he got it in the truck when one of the guys at the tool store sold him a set of planks with steel brackets that attached to the tailgate, and he rolled it up and in. He reversed the process getting into the SuperGoose, and used the tail ramp to make things easy. He flew back to Allakaket, unloaded, and used the ramps again to get it into his Suburban since it had a bigger bed with the seats folded down. When he got home, he unloaded the truck, walked into the house and collapsed on the couch.

The next day he started on the interior painting, since he knew that even with drop cloths he would still get some paint on the floor. Luckily Sam wasn't picky about paint, so he got a shade of white indoor latex, and got enough to do the whole interior of the house. He went from room to room, cleaning and painting walls. A month later, he was ready to start sanding and refinishing the floors. Bert, Larry, and Oliver Jr. had managed to leave several scratches in the wood, so he needed to give it a light sanding, then re-varnish it. Sanding and varnishing the floors didn't take as long as painting, so he had some time left to build a jungle gym and sandbox for the boys. He got a plan off the internet for a kid-proof jungle gym, and he needed to build a frame to hold the sand in. He cut down 2 suitable trees, and made a 12 x 12 foot sandbox, then had enough sand delivered to fill it 8 inches deep, which would be sufficient to break a short fall without breaking anything important. He built an A-frame out of 6x6 lumber, bolted it together with 10" lag bolts, and attached a plastic slide, 2 safety swings, and a climbing rope. Sam came out and supervised periodically, and when it was finished, Bert and Larry gave it their seal of approval. Soon the sandbox was populated by Tonka Trucks, and they learned basic earthmoving skills, like how to make diesel noises; and basic driving skills like accelerating right before a head-on crash, with extra sound effects. Oliver was banned from the sandbox when he tried to use it for a litter box. Oliver's favorite game was Tug of War, which he always won (you didn't argue too much with a wolf) and his second favorite game Fetch, or as Oliver thought of it "Keep Away". He'd go get the sticks, but hadn't figured the "bring it here" part out too well. Nap time was always spent with the 3 Amigos curled up on Oliver's bearskin rug. Sam realized that Oliver was tightly bonded to Bert and Larry, and treated them as litter mates, and Ralph and Sam as the Alpha Male and Female of his pack. He got housebroken quickly, and rarely had an indoor accident. Bert and Larry were learning responsibility from caring for Oliver.

With Ralph busy between Honey-do's and flying the SuperGoose twice a week to Anchorage for Grocery runs, Sam realized the garden was her job, and enlisted Bert and Larry's help. Oliver supervised, and chased off the occasional rabbit. Since he never learned to hunt, he just chased them instead of killing and eating them, to Sam's relief. Luckily Oliver never went out of sight, and always returned when Sam or Ralph whistled for him. One day one of the neighborhood dogs got loose when Sam and the kids were in the back yard, and Ralph was flying the SuperGoose. Before Sam could draw her .45, Oliver had stood up to the much bigger dog, and chased it off, snapping at its hindquarters. When Oliver returned, Sam gave him a big hug, and said "Thanks Oliver!" When Ralph got home, he heard the story, and gave Oliver a big hug too, then called Bill, and described the dog. Bill told him if the dog came into their

yard again, and Sam felt like it was threatening her or the kids, she had his permission to shoot the dog, and he'd deal with the owners. Bill guessed which dog it was, and on his way home stopped at the owner's house and had a word with them about keeping their dog in their yard. They promised to try harder, but he had broken every rope they put him on. Bill suggested a large chain-link fence kennel with a chain-link roof that would be escape-proof, and they could put his dog house inside it for shelter. When the owner said he didn't have the money, Bill handed him a \$50 bill, and said that would cover it, but he wanted to see a nice large kennel up within the week, and the dog inside it.

Ron was glad he had semi-retired, and was only flying clients back and forth to Doc's lodge. BA was working 40-60 hours a week trying to keep up with everything, and finally had to hire an assistant. Since the kids were grown, Sally volunteered to work with BA 3 days a week. The extra 24 hours of help made BA's work load easier, and improved BA's attitude, which was what Sally was hoping for. Ron's 4 kids, and BA's 2 still flew the 007 to "Uncle Bear's" place several times a week for shooting practice. Since Jake, Josh, Sarah, Mike and Jill were all in the Militia, and David would be in another year; Bear took time while they were up there to teach them tactics and survival techniques. Basically they got an advanced version of the curriculum taught at the Survival School, including a bunch of stuff that was probably still classified, but Bear realized that these kids might be the only defenders of the village in another 20-30 years. He included his two sons Tom and Gary, who had de-squirrelified and settled down. Hunter's 4 kids were also in the program, and were the best trackers of the bunch. Ralph and Sam came up to cross-train the kids in First Aid, and slowly progressed from First Responder training up to EMT I and II over the years. Several of the kids wound up becoming Combat Medics, and eventually got certified as Alaska State Paramedics on their 18th Birthday.

Jake and Josh both showed an interest in learning to fly, so Ron spent 1 day a week with each of them after they spent months studying for their FAA Student Pilot's license. Jake got his Private Pilot license a year later, just after his 18th birthday and kept studying for his Commercial ticket. When he was confident of Jake's flying skills, Ron ordered another SuperGoose, and told his sons they had 6 months to earn their commercial ticket. Jake flew right seat with his Dad every time he flew, and Josh flew right seat every time Ralph flew. By the time the SuperGoose was finished, they had enough hours to get their Commercial Ticket, so they could fly the SuperGoose. Ron had no intention of letting them fly paying customers, but they needed $\frac{3}{4}$ of a Commercial Ticket to fly a twin-engine turboprop amphibian. Dan just shook his head when they both passed the Commercial test with flying colors. Ron certified them himself for their type rating, since they learned to fly in the SuperGoose. Ron bought another multi-purpose SuperGoose for Jake and Josh to fly the rest of the kids back and forth to Bear's place, and to Anchorage and Fairbanks for selected social events. Several Christian Bands had scheduled stops in Anchorage en route to Russia, so the kids that wanted to go to the concert piled in the SuperGoose, and Jake flew them there and back. Jake was an even more careful pilot than Ron was at his age, basically because his Dad accidentally scared the crap out of him showing him a stall recovery.

Ron and Ralph made the time once a week to go shooting at Bear's place, since shooting at the indoor range wasn't as fun as shooting the M -25 at 600 yards, or the M -200 at 1,000 yards. Since Ron and Ralph went, their wives decided to attend as well. With intensive coaching (and some very personal motivational techniques) their wives were soon shooting sub-moa groups with their M-25's at the 600-yard range. Ron, Jake, and Sarah were all shooting their M-200's on the 1,000 yard line, and Jake was starting to give his dad fits, because some days first and second place would be decided by 1 round out of 20, and none of their rounds strayed much out of the X-ring. Sarah's groups were slowly getting smaller and smaller as she got more experience. Bear came up with an excellent idea, and told everyone to bring a sleeping bag next week, because they were going to practice shooting their night scopes. The shooters with the M-25s were complaining that they didn't have night scopes for their rifles. Bear said that they had plenty of AN/PVS-10 night vision scopes in inventory, and all he had to do was mount and boresight them, but they'd have to re-zero their daytime scopes after removing and re-mounting them. That brought a chorus of groans until Bear quoted Marcinko's 6th rule of Spec War: "Thou has not to like it - thou hast just to do it." Ralph and Sam remembered the training George had given them, and thought how long it had been since they lived in Atlanta, maybe 6-7 years ago? Ralph wondered how George was doing.

1 week later, they flew back to Bear's place in the late afternoon. Bear had mounted the AN/PVS-10 on each of their M -25 rifles, and the special Swarovski Night Vision scopes on the M-200s. As it was growing dark, he took them out to the 100 yard range to zero the scopes, then moved them progressively over to the 300, 600 and 1,000 yard ranges as their accuracy improved. All the M -200 shooters were on the 1,000 yard line by midnight, and everyone but David and Jill were shooting their M-25's on the 600 yard line. David and Jill were shooting their AR-15's on the 300-yard line, and doing ok for the first time shooting a scope that could see in the dark. At midnight, Bear called a halt to shooting and told everyone to case up their rifles and head to the lodge. Since he didn't have enough rooms for the parents to have their own rooms, he had set up bunk beds in the two rooms, and it was boys on one side, and girls on the other. The next morning, they ate a hearty breakfast, and back to the shooting range to re-zero their daylight scopes. Everyone wrote down the zero settings for their day and night scopes, and taped the paper to the stock. When everyone was satisfied with their zero, Bear told them to get back into the lodge, and clean their rifles, then he was going to give them a brief lecture about night firing. They finished around noon, and flew back to Allakaket.

The rest of the summer, Jake and Josh worked as Assistant Guides at Doc's Lodge, and David and Sarah helped out with the fishing boats. Jake wanted to become a registered guide, and the guide he was working with said he was just about ready. With a plane and his State Guiding license, he could make a good living as a guide. Jake asked his Dad, who was tempted to say no, but realized that none of his kids wanted to be members of the idle rich. He thought the SuperGoose was a little much for a guide plane, but realized it would be safer than a small Cessna, since it could stop quicker and take off faster. He asked Jake if he wanted to fly the SuperGoose when he was guiding, or if he wanted another plane. Jake admitted he was hooked on the Goose, and all the other amphibious planes on the market weren't even in the same class.

Ron agreed, and told Jake he could use the SuperGoose to fly guiding clients once he got his State license as a registered guide. Jake was ready for this, and had the application in hand, the next test date, and the study guide. Ron felt like he had been snookered (he had) but knew he could afford to buy each of his kids a SuperGoose and not even touch any of the money he had invested. Jake was still dating the girl he had a crush on years ago, and Ron knew things could get serious if Jake had a good job and a plane, so he sat Jake down and talked to him.

“Jake, I know you’re still dating Diane, how are things doing?”

“Actually I need your advice, I knew you got married early, and had us while you were still young. I don’t know if I want to wait or start having a family.”

“How were you planning on supporting them?”

“Well, if I pass the State Registered Guide test, I could fly and guide hunters.”

“Jake, that’s barely a living.”

“I know, that’s the problem. I was going to ask you for a job since I have my commercial ticket, but you seem to be full up on pilots.”

“Son, actually Steve’s wanted to leave for almost a year, and he accepted an offer from an oil company to fly for them. If we could work out the scheduling, you could fly for Allakaket Airlines as a relief pilot when you’re not out guiding. I could pay you \$30,000 per year as a relief pilot, which would be enough to comfortably raise a family up here, then you could do whatever you wanted with the guiding money. I’d suggest investing in your own business like I did, that way your money grows faster. If you wanted, I could set you up with the same deal as Ralph and Sam, where I lease the plane to you for \$1 per year, and we take care of the fuel and maintenance if you agree to fly the plane as a relief plane for Allakaket Airlines when you’re not guiding.”

“Thanks Dad, that’s what I hoped you’d say. Would it be OK with you if I proposed to Diane?”

“Son, you’re 18 and a man now, you can do what you want, but to answer your unasked question, yes you have my blessing!”

Jake gave his Dad a hug, and flew out the door to spring the news on Diane. Unknown to Ron, Jake had been saving all the money he made as an Assistant guide, and already had the ring in his pocket when he talked to his dad. Diane, who had just turned 18, was half-Inuit, with beautiful long black hair and deep emerald green eyes. They had basically been dating since Jake turned 16, and now that Jake turned 18, things had gotten serious, and Jake saved all his money for a ring. He drove over to Diane’s house, and met her Dad at the door. He followed the old Inuit custom of asking the father first if he could marry his daughter. Since Kevin was

from Wisconsin, he thought it was strange until he remembered he had to ask Alexandra's father first. Kevin went through the same ritual as Alexandra's father went through with him. "Jake, how are you going to support my daughter and your children?"

"Sir, I've got a commercial pilot's license, and I'm applying for a registered guide license. My dad offered me a job flying as a relief pilot for Allakaket Airlines when I'm not guiding that pays \$30 thousand a year, and he gave me the use of a SuperGoose for personal and business use. I've got \$5,000 in savings, plus a trust fund that's worth at least \$5 Million."

"Have you provided a Kill?"

Jake showed Kevin a Caribou skin from a caribou he killed that season, which satisfied the ritual.

"Very well, if my daughter agrees, you have my blessing."

"Thank you Father."

Ron walked to the living and called Diane. When he saw her, she was wearing native garb, so evidently they were doing this the traditional way. He laid the caribou skin at her feet, and the ring box, then broke with tradition by getting down on one knee and asking Diane to marry him. When she said yes, he picked up the ring box, stood, and slipped the ring on her right ring finger, and handed her the caribou skin. She jumped into his arms and gave him a big kiss right in front of her parents.

"So when do you want to get married?"

"How about the Winter Solstice at high noon?"

"Where do you want to get married?"

"In the church silly!"

"So I guess this means I'll need a tux?"

Jake pulled out his cell phone, and found out his Mom and Dad were at home waiting for the news. When Jake told them, Nancy asked if they could come over for dinner that evening. Diane just smiled, so Jake took that as a yes. Nancy told Jake that they could come on over. Jake and Diane got in Jake's truck and drove over to his parent's house. Diane sat on the bench seat right next to him, and he drove 1 handed with his arm around his fiancé. When they stopped the truck in front of his parent's house, Diane gave him a big kiss. "Jake Williams, I love you!"

“I love you too Diane, and I can’t wait for the wedding day.”

“One last requirement is you have to have our house ready before the wedding, so you need to get busy!”

“Yikes, I forgot about that! I hope you like living in a Teepee!”

“Jake, that was not funny!”

Diane gave Jake another kiss anyway, and they walked in the door holding hands. Nancy and Ron were there to greet the couple, and hugs were exchanged, then they sat down on the sofas and talked. Jake told his dad he had just about 90 days to build their house. Ron was confused until Diane explained she was half-Inuit, and it was her people’s tradition. Ron picked up his phone and called Bill.

“Bill, its Ron. Jake’s getting married, and needs to build a house. Any ideas for where to build?”

“Ron, I’ve got 5,000 acres of good land behind the inn.”

“Bill, there’s a hill on the other side of your inn!”

“The land’s on the other side of the hill. I always wanted to expand Allakaket into that area, but no one’s had the money to pay to build a road. If Jake wants to buy 100 acres and pay to cut the road to his property, I can sell it for \$500 an acre.”

“Bill, if he pays to have the road cut, he’ll do the most expensive part, and you’ll make out like a bandit selling the other properties. How about we split the costs, and you sell the property for \$500 an acre?”

“Sounds like a Deal Ron.”

“Jake, Bill’s got a lot available, but it’s on the other side of the hill behind his lodge. He’ll sell you 100 acres for \$500 an acre, and split the costs of building a road to it.”

“Dad, can I have the phone?”

Ron handed Jake the phone.

“Bill, it’s Jake, I’m interested, but I wanted any usable wood from the logging operation to make the road, and I’ll have dad rent the bulldozer and fly it in with the Super Stallion assuming it weighs less than 36,000 pounds. I’ll help build the road and my house.”

“OK, Jake, everything sounds OK, just come over to my office and sign the contract tomorrow.”

“Thanks Bill.”

“Dad, can we borrow 007 tomorrow to check out the land on the other side of the hill. I don’t want to buy something sight unseen.”

Ron got on the phone and reserved 007 for 0900 tomorrow.

“Dad, it’s going to be expensive building a house back there. I might need to take some money out of my trust fund.”

“We were going to give you two a wedding present anyway, how about if we pay for the costs of building the road and clearing your lot. If we run it through the business, it’s probably a write-off anyway!”

Jake knew it would cost between \$10 and \$50 thousand to build a road over the hill and clear his lot. He turned to Diane and asked her how big of a house she wanted.

“We’ve talked about this before, and I think a 4-bedroom house with a full basement would be plenty big enough since we only want two kids.”

Nancy asked “So what’s the 4th bedroom for?”

Jake replied “For an office, storage, or in case we have an Oops!”

“Huh?”

“Oops, as in Kid #3.”

Ron joked with Jake, “Well if you go to the doctor after #2, I can pretty much assure you Kid #3 would constitute a miracle.”

Jake crossed his knees and groaned “Oow!”

Nancy and Diane laughed themselves silly - compared to pregnancy and delivery, getting fixed was a walk in the park.

Nancy said that Dinner was ready, and they got mobbed by Jake’s siblings, also by Starsky and Hutch. Sarah and Diane were good friends, so she gave Diane a hug. David and Josh both asked Jake if they could have his room. Jake answered by punching them both in the shoulder. They sat down at the dinner table to a lovely Italian dinner. Ron said grace, and they all started

passing food. Later that night, Jake drove Diane back home, and the goodnight kiss she gave him made him wish the wedding was tomorrow. He tried and failed miserably to concentrate on his driving on the way home, but didn't hit anything.

Chapter 61 - The Big Expansion

Ron did some checking, and a Cat D-5N weighed around 28 thousand pounds fully loaded, which was well within the weight limit of the Super Stallion. With 121 horsepower and a 10-foot blade, it would make short work of building the new road. He called around Anchorage, and found out that Elmendorf had a D-5 that was just sitting there collecting rust. He had Gene call the CO of Elmendorf and see if they could “borrow” it. Gene called him back, and the Air Force had just listed it as Surplus, and if they wanted it, they could buy it for \$10 thousand. Ron said it was worth \$50 to \$100 Thousand. Gene explained that the government basically gave surplus equipment away to get rid of it. Ron told Gene to make it happen. 2 hours later, Gene called back and said it was theirs, but they had to come over and pick it up. Ron called the airport and told them they needed to fly the Super Stallion to Elmendorf and pick up a Caterpillar D-5N tractor with a 10-foot dozer blade, and a 3-shank ripper. He told them it weighed around 28 thousand pounds, so unless they were shipping it with 8 thousand pounds of accessories they didn’t tell him about, it should be fine. The next day, the Super Stallion flew to Elmendorf, picked up the Cat D-5 and flew it back to Allakaket. Ron wire transferred the \$10 thousand per the surplus sales instructions. When they landed and unhooked the Caterpillar, their diesel mechanic was crawling all over it. He said that once they replaced the hydraulic fluid, and serviced it, they should be good to go.

Meanwhile Jake, Diane, and Bill flew over the land with the 007, and it was nice and flat and heavily wooded. Their property came right down to the lake, which meant they had fishing rights to the lake if they wanted to go fishing. They flew back to Allakaket, and Jake signed the purchase contract. Ron had authorized him to transfer any needed funds out of his Trust fund, so Bill transferred \$5 thousand out of Jake’s account into his personal account, and Jake owned 100 acres of lakefront property. Bear contacted one of the heavy equipment operators at the mine, who agreed in a heartbeat to working the Cat 5N and building a road. He used to work for the Alaska Department of Transportation, and that’s how the ADT built roads, they used large bulldozers to knock the trees down. 2 weeks later, a regulation-width road ran from the main street of Allakaket over the hill, and past Jake’s property. A bunch of loggers came in and cleared the trees off his building site and moved the logs off to 1 side. The dozer ripped the stumps out, then Hunter came over and set some ANFO charges to loosen the soil for their basement, and the D-5 finished the job. Now all he had to do was get the house built. The Super Stallion flew the D-5 over to the mine, since they could use it there, so Ron got the road built basically for free. Bill paid Ron \$500 to cover his half of the road building costs, and Ron put the money in Jake’s account.

Jake hired the same contractor his Dad and BA had, and they went over the plans. Since he already had 2 acres worth of good wood logged, the contractor adjusted his price to reflect the lower cost. Jake’s house would be about 2,000 square feet, with a 2,000 square foot, 12 foot deep basement. The contractor said it would cost \$100 thousand to build it including an AE system like the one his Dad had, and a garage/shop, plus another building to store a large

propane tank, and 500 gallons of Avgas. Jake had already put in an order for a Snow Bug, and Ralph said he'd help him build it to pay him back for all the wood he cut over the years, all Jake had to buy was the parts. Two weeks before the wedding, the house was complete, and Jake showed it to Diane. They flew to Fairbanks and did some shopping. By now the furniture store manager in Fairbanks loved to hear that someone from Allakaket wanted to shop at his store, because it usually meant that they wanted to drop over 10 grand in cash at his store. They flew back with a plane load of furniture, and made a second trip the next day to pick up the rest. Diane liked flying right seat with Jake, and he didn't seem to mind either. They finally had the house furnished and ready to go 1 week before the wedding. Bill met them for Marriage Counseling several times before the wedding. Jake decided to make Josh his best man, so Diane picked Sarah, or was it the other way around. Either way, it was like the "Sly and the Family Stone" song "A Family Affair" - Jake's whole family was in the wedding in one way or another. Diane didn't have much family, just her mother and father, but most of the town was invited. Good thing they had built the new church years ago, since they needed all the seating capacity to handle the crowd. Jake and Diane had requested a special ceremony with Bill performing the Christian and Legal ceremony, and the Village Shaman blessing the union so that their marriage would be recognized by the Inuit tribe. Since Diane was half-Inuit, their kids would still be members of the tribe if they so desired, and the Federal Government was throwing tons of money to the Native Americans as compensation for stealing their land. Not that their kids would need it, but if worse came to worse, and something happened to Jake, the tribe would protect and take care of Diane and the kids if their marriage was recognized by the tribe.

Finally the day of the wedding arrived. Jake had rented a grey tux, and everyone else wore basic black tuxes, including Bill, the Minister. Carl, the village Shaman, was wearing a caribou skin robe decorated with wolf and bear skin over his tux. The robe had been passed down through generations of Shaman, and was transferred to the new shaman in an elaborate ceremony. Bill and Carl saw eye to eye on most things, since Carl was a Christian too, and wove Inuit beliefs and folklore into their Christianity as a bridge between the two cultures. Bill liked that, and had formed a friendship with Carl over the years, since they were in the same business, so to speak. The organist was playing selections from J.S. Bach while the crowd took their seats. At 5 minutes to noon, Bill, Carl, Jake, and Josh walked out to the area in front of the altar. 3 minutes later, Sarah marched down the aisle by herself. Jake and Josh were taken aback by how pretty their tomboy sister looked in a dress. At exactly 12:00 noon of the winter solstice, the strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March were heard from the organ. The Church doors opened, and there stood Diane in a stunning long white wedding dress with a full-length train and a finger-tip veil. Her raven-black hair gleamed in the sunlight, her eyes were like green lasers, and her lips were painted bright red. This was the first time Jake had seen his fiancé all dolled up, and she was even more beautiful than he imagined. She walked slowly down the aisle on her father's arm, and when they got to the front of the church, Bill asked "Who gives this woman in marriage?"

Kevin answered "Her Mother and I do" then handed Diane off to Jake and got a kiss on the

cheek from his daughter before he sat back down. The foursome then turned and faced the altar. Bill started with the immortal words “Dearly Beloved...” The rest of the ceremony was a blur to Jake, except he was entranced by the beauty of his bride to be. He finally snapped out of it when they came to the vows. Jake answered “I do” at the appropriate time in a clear voice, and 2 minutes later, Diane answered “I do” as well. Nancy flashed back to Ralph and Sam’s wedding, and what she had joked with Ron about the night before. They were laying in bed, and Nancy just blurted out “You remember what happened last time the 4 of us were at a wedding?” Ron nodded but didn’t say anything so Nancy continued “You think maybe we should station Bear outside the front door with an H&K MP-5/10SD?”

Ron started laughing out loud at the image of Bear standing guard at the entrance to the church with a submachine gun. Ron said “I’m pretty sure the 4 of us will be packing tomorrow, and there will be 12 bullets in anyone that attempts to interrupt the wedding.”

“I guess this means we had better warn the town drunk not to try and crash the wedding!”

They both laughed their heads off, which eased the strain and stress that had been building over their son’s wedding. They soon fell asleep in each other’s arms.

Finally they got to the end of the wedding, and due to the outcome of a coin flip, Carl went first. He walked up to the couple, and spoke to them in Inuktitut, the language of the Inuit peoples. Jake only understood a few words, but Diane and all the Inuit villagers understood clearly. When he finished, he lifted the corners of his great robe, and covered the 3 of them with the robe. Then he stepped back and Bill said “With the exchange of rings and vows in front of God and these witnesses, I declare you married before God and according to the State of Alaska. What God has joined, let no man separate. Jake you may kiss your bride.” Knowing that the Williams family were notorious big kissers, he waited until the couple came up for air, then turned them and faced the audience “It’s my pleasure to present Jake and Diane Williams.” The congregation stood as one and applauded, and then after the couple walked out of the church, the townspeople formed a line and pelted the couple with rice. Jake and Diane drove back to Ron and Nancy’s house for the reception, and later that evening, drove to their new home. When they opened the garage door to park Jake’s truck, they were in for a surprise. Inside were a brand-new Ford F-450 4x4 diesel pick-up truck, and a brand-new Snow Bug, painted June Bug green with a blue racing stripe to differentiate it from Ralph’s all-green Snow Bug. There was a note on each vehicle. The note on the truck said: “Congratulations, this truck, and a 500-gallon tank of diesel we had installed and connected to the 10KW diesel generator in your basement is the balance of our wedding present to you. Love, Mom & Dad”

The note on the snow bug simply said “Jake and Diane: I had a choice of building your Snow Bug now, and getting out of the rest of my Honey-do list, or building it this winter, and having to do the rest of my list. We decided to give you the parts as a wedding present, so you got your Snow Bug early.” Jake looked into the Snow bug and was confused by the new belt system. There were 5 belts where there were 4, so he called up Ralph. “Ralph, what Gives?””

“I talked to the Corporate Lawyer, he’s a real crusty old Curmudgeon, and he insisted that all further Snow Bugs be equipped with 5- point harnesses, just in case you crash, and your estate decided to sue.”

“Ralph, what would I sue for, in a few years, I’ll have as much money as you!”

“That’s what I told the old Coot, but he insisted.”

“Ok Ralph, Diane’s giving me the look - I better get on with the honeymoon!”

“Enjoy it while you can - once they discover the “Honey-do List”, you’re Doomed!”

Jake laughed his head off as he hung up, then picked up Diane and carried her to their bedroom.